

CULTIVATING THE SPIRITUAL AWARENESS  
OF CHILDREN TO HEAR FROM GOD  
AND PRAY FOR THEIR PEERS

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **CULTIVATING THE SPIRITUAL AWARENESS OF CHILDREN TO HEAR GOD AND PRAY FOR THEIR PEERS**

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The context for this project is Children's Ministry at Ray of Hope Christian Church. The theme is spiritual growth of children, and how to cultivate their innate spiritual power. The ministry lacks training children to minister. The purpose is to teach children to hear God's voice during a six-week training. The hypothesis: if children are taught to hear God's voice they would then be able to pray for their peers. Qualitative research is the design method using surveys, teaching, journals, and observation. Project implementation is the opportunity to pray for or give testimony to other children during altar call opportunities.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I am thankful to United Theological Seminary, the professors, staff, Dr. Scott Kisker, administration and especially Dr. Young for his faithful and encouraging recruitment that resulted in stirring in me the desire to reach for this higher academic endeavor. I thank Rev. Dr. Keith Lawrence for bringing me to my first Dayton Intensive, and putting in my ears the profound statement, “if you follow the process, the process works, you will make it.” Special thanks go to Dr. Sharon E. Davis who walked with a very unsure Semester One student, giving assistance and assurance until I found the correct niche. I especially thank my mentor, Dr. Frank Billman, whose smile, steady guiding hand of patience, encouragement, prayers and confidence kept me in the process. Thanks to my group, my correct niche, the Supernatural Ministry focus group, you were phenomenal in your support on this journey. I have gained friends and colleagues for the continuation of what God has for me. God brought us together.

I am blessed to have a phenomenal team of associates. Thanks to Gail M. Nealy, my Peer Associate, for her support in prayer and calls of encouragement. Thanks to Rev. Dr. Darryl Trimiew, Dr. Kamania Wynter- Hoyte, Dr. Felicia Lively, and Andrea Long-Wimbush Esq., all excellent Professional Associates, who gave unwavering support and insight on this journey.

Thank God for the love and support of my church and for my Pastor, Rev. Dr. Cynthia L. Hale. Her incredible commitment to being a witness at the finish line kept me

kept me motivated and moving forward. Thanks to the Children's Ministry of Ray of Hope for supporting the academic project to become a reality. The parents of children who participated took the commitment seriously. Thank you.

Thank you is not an adequate expression for the context associates: Rev. Kraig Murray and Karen Murray, and Dr. Lively who faithfully read and re-read, called and met, made suggestions, and corrections. Each professional helped to make this endeavor cross the finish line. You were willing to get in my face when I seemed to move slow, you all were there and kept pushing. Thank you! I thank my daughter Vida Musgrove who arranged for my transportation to those intensives and peer sessions. Thanks go to my God-Son Apostle Steven Wilhite and my best friend, Rev. Sandra Thompson and Ron Turner for being non-stop prayer warriors, always standing in the gap in my daily life. To Kaye Watson, my college friend who kept saying, "girl go ahead" all the way from California. Thank you.

In closing, I want to thank God the Father for this life he gave me and how he prepared me for this portion of the journey. I thank my Mother in Glory who I believe is looking over the balcony of heaven, cheering and watching for the next step. I thank my three adult children, who always believed and supported their Mom. I thank them for their help with their Step-father while I made trips to intensive's and peer groups. Thanks to my grandchildren and great-grands who watched and smiled, shaking their heads in wonder. Please know that you can accomplish every dream. Keep putting one foot in front of the other and with Christ leading the way desires become reality.

Thanks to literally everyone who prayed, laughed, read, listened, called and cheered me on.

## **DEDICATION**

God has a way of leading us to our destiny when we are often unaware. I did not have a perception of the call to pastor children and neither did my surrounding colleagues; but God knew and designed a marvelous plan, and I think I stumbled into Jeremiah 29:11, “I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future” (NIV). This work is therefore dedicated to Father God, who is indeed a good, good Father, who loved me in spite of all my mistakes. God led me to this season and through this process to fit and shape me for the next step.

This work is also dedicated to all, literally all, of the children and young people that God has placed in and passed through my life. Beginning with my three children, eleven grandchildren and five great-grandchildren. There have been hundreds of children, some private music students, some choir participants, foster children, the National Gospel Music Children’s choir and classes, children’s church children, Bible study students, hundreds of second and third graders, middle schoolers and high school chorus students over a span of thirty years. The list could go on of children and young people that shared their love, hugs, questions and growing pains that made me attentive and sensitive to their needs. I pray they all hear the voice of God and live as lights in this world.



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## **ABBREVIATIONS**

CPG	Children's Prayer Group
CDF	Children's Defense Fund
NKJV	New King James Version
KJV	King James Version
NIV	New International Version
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
MSG	Message Bible
GCP	Great Commission Publication

Failure is not an option

— Gene Kranz, NASA Director, Apollo 13 Mission

## INTRODUCTION

*“For Their Sake”*

*When Israel stood to receive the Torah,  
The Holy One, blessed be He, said to them:  
I am giving you my Torah.  
Bring me good guarantors that you will guard it,  
and I shall give it to you.  
They said:  
Our fathers are our guarantors.  
The Holy One, blessed be He said to them:  
Your fathers are unacceptable to me.  
Yet bring me good guarantors,  
and I shall give it to you.  
They said to him:  
Master of the universe,  
our prophets are our guarantors.  
He said to them:  
Your prophets are unacceptable to me.  
Yet bring me good guarantors, and I shall give it to you.  
They said:  
Behold, our children are our guarantors.  
The Holy One, blessed be He, said:  
They are certainly good guarantors.  
For their sake, I give you the Torah.<sup>1</sup>*

*Canticles Rabbah (Midrash)*

Ministry to children matters to God! Ministry to children matters to me! Ministry from children matters to the body of Christ! In the reading above, the good guarantors were the children and for their sake the Torah was given. How powerful is the image of

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<sup>1</sup> Shannon P. Daley, Kathleen A. Guy. *Welcome the Child: A Child Advocacy Guide for Churches*. “Stories for Their Sake” (New York, NY: Friendship Press, Inc. 1994), 24.

God giving for the sake of the innocents! How awesome for power and trust to be imparted for the sake of the children, for work in the kingdom.

I bring up the following information from the Children's Defense Fund (CDF), because I believe an awareness of the plight of children in the 21st century might aid the church into the urgency of now! The CDF exists to provide a strong and effective voice for all children in America.<sup>2</sup> The organization seeks to monitor and educate the nation about the needs of children. The CDF gathers data and disseminates information on key issues affecting children. The CDF reports from the last census in 2012 in their State of America's Children report, that there is a total of 78,728,088 children in America.<sup>3</sup> Here are some very important findings that might alarm the church body!

The following was reported by the CDF:

Every 21 seconds a child is arrested

Every 20 seconds a child is born to an unwed mother

Every 62 seconds a child is born into extreme poverty

Every 1.5 minutes a child is born to a teen mother

Every 2.1 minutes a child is arrested for a drug offense

Every 4 hours a teen commits suicide

Every 5.5 hours a child is killed by a gun, and 361 of those were in California

A single mom has to work 2.5 full time minimum wage jobs to afford a two-small bedroom unit (Inadequate time for effective parenting) and the list goes on.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Daley and Guy. *Welcome the Child*, Cover page.

<sup>3</sup> Daley and Guy, *Welcome*, 35.

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. 2012. "2012 National Population Projections: Summary Tables." html. accessed March 15, 2016, <http://www.census.gov/population/projections/data/national/2012/summarytables>.

These facts paint a macabre and morose picture that I believe screams help! It is a picture that causes me to join in the pathetic and painful words of the late R&B singer of the 70's, Marvin Gaye on his Inner-City Blues album entitled, "What's Going On." From his hit song of the same name, he repeats the phrase "make me wanna -holla, throw up both my hands and say ... what's going on?"<sup>5</sup> This study recognizes that components of these natural facts affect the lives of children. I believe there is a supernatural war raging for the lives of children. These facts reflect what has happened in the family and the structure of teaching and raising children. Humanity has an enemy whose job it is to rob, kill and destroy. In the face of facts, it looks like a very troubling situation and disaster.

These facts and situations also bring about this questionable thought; what will happen to the innate spiritual gifts ordained by God to minister to the body of Christ if the children are destroyed? This disconcerting thought began the development of the vision for this project. God has placed an enormous value on innocents. Innocent children matter to God and to his plan in the earth. Today's state of the child from this writer's perspective doesn't line up with the plan, purpose, description or statements of God about children.

My experiences and readings in the Doctoral program and Supernatural ministry focus group led to the clear development of the theme of under-nourished children's innate spiritual connections that are needed to help make the body of Christ whole. The process of writing four foundational papers gave clearer direction to the project of

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<sup>5</sup> Marvin Gaye, *What's Going On*, composed by Renaldo Benson, produced by Marvin Gaye, recorded June 1970, Tamla Label, subsidiary of Motown Records. Hitsville. U.S.A Golden World, United Sound Studios, Detroit, MI, Sound Factory West Hollywood, CA. Released Detroit, MI: May 21, 1971.

training children to hear the voice of God and to pray for their peers. The four papers, Biblical Foundations, Historical Foundations, Theological Foundations and Theoretical Foundations directed the information and backdrop for this project.

Chapter One, introduces the ministry background of this researcher and why this study of children and hearing the voice of God is pertinent for the church today. Chapter two, the Biblical Foundation chapter addresses the innocents. Children are generally labeled the helpless, the vulnerable, the costly and many times, the useless. They are often labeled voiceless; valueless and are without a vote. The Biblical Foundations chapter discusses God's perspective of children and His worth in their praise. From an exegetical perspective of the Old Testament text Psalm 8: 2 says, "Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants you have ordained strength" (NKJV).<sup>6</sup> God's glory and power are reflected in the infants and babes. God's glory and power are powerful sounds from the mouth of babes and sucklings.

The New Testament portion of this chapter highlights Matthew 18:1-6, which enhances the discussion with scenes of how Jesus interacted with children during his ministry. Jesus seems to have a relationship with children who appear present during many events of His ministry. The Bible shows that Jesus holds in high regard the trust and faith of children. The resulting project developed from this study reveals that God still holds children in worthy regard to do spiritual warfare, which is usually neglected by the institutional church.

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<sup>6</sup> Psalm 8:2 New King James Version. Unless otherwise noted all Scripture references in this document are from the New International Version 2011.

Chapter Three, the Historical Foundation chapter presents evidence of the Holy Spirit speaking and working through children as early as church Father, Cyprian [c.200-258]. Children being visited and led by the voice of the Holy Spirit have been the catalyst to revivals, city wide prayer circles, healings and to the First Great Awakening. In today's world, many children are exploited by the hype of the media, and sometimes their parent or parents. Many children find themselves on the short end waiting for time and involvement from significant others. There are still large numbers of children often left to raise themselves, by whatever means necessary. Information and exposure is at their fingertips through instant social electronic communication which masquerades itself as fun, entertaining, a babysitter and even as learning. Not only are the children labeled as innocents, and weak, but they are also the portion of the population who fall victim to the social and economic rise and fall of the system. Children become expendable as well as sacrificial. The church, families and various organizations are often doing their best to plan and implement programs that teach our children the stories of the Bible to navigate them through life. All that said, what better time than now to activate the sound of God's voice in the ear of children. What better time than now to train or help children into a deeper experience with God, aimed at giving lasting results. Children do hear the invitation to accept Christ into their heart and be baptized. Once there, is there more? This writer believes there is more, that every believer (often called a child of God) is filled by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is not age based; nor are there exemption clauses, or a child's portion of the Holy Spirit. Children who are believers are considered Christ's disciples. Jesus tells his disciples and us in John 14:12, "Very truly, I tell you,



the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these ...” (NRSV).

In Chapter Four, the Theological Foundation chapter searches out the need for the church to help shape an understanding of the supernatural Holy Spirit and His works to the community of children. The concept of the Sovereignty of God and Relational Theology along with the Theologian Karl Barth, factor in the thought that a caring, interactive God included all of his creation in the ability to give glory in his kingdom. All of his creation can proclaim his glory and that includes children. Information from Practical Theology reflects on the subject of the church’s lack of commitment to nurturing spiritual things in children. Theological themes have not addressed the nature of faith in children. In this chapter, Ecclesiology clearly includes children as a part of the body of the church.

Children can reflect the things of God in the world, just as other believers. Pneumatology is controversial, especially as it relates to children. Can children understand the invisible world and natural world? Often the church forgets that much of what is shown to children daily on media is all imagination, magic and mystical. Can the church afford to leave teachings about the Holy Spirit, and experience with the Holy Spirit, on a back burner for the children? If God has given His Spirit to believers, children believers must receive teaching on the great gift. The final theological concept touched on in the Theological chapter is Kingdom theology and how children may be a part of the Kingdom and the will of God in the earth.

Chapter Five is the Theoretical Foundation chapter that details the gathered information regarding ministry sources that involve teaching children about the Holy

Spirit. A resource search revealed curriculums and programs that taught children to hear from God. The Theoretical Foundations chapter searched Christian schools, Bible studies for children and curriculums from various denominations for any past or current teachings on the Holy Spirit to children. The Theoretical chapter provided teaching methodology for the project. Where does one begin training with the idea of teaching children to hear from God and pray for their peers? The Theoretical chapter helped to focus the project due to the discovery of curriculums with the intent to train children to hear the voice of God. The Theoretical chapter gave practical meaning to the project.

The problem focus throughout this presentation is the lack of teaching children to minister. It is manifest in the lack of curriculums and church programing that highlights scriptural memorization, Bible stories, dramas, songs, and fun with very little teaching on the Holy Spirit and who children are in Christ. The result of this neglect causes the church to silence the power in the ministry of children. The current focus of children's ministry is wonderful but leaving out the power of the Holy Spirit leaves children powerless as young believers. Current children's ministry focus is on ministry to children with little development of preparing children for ministry. It is important to bring about the ministry of children.

As the doctoral program continued the project took form. Chapter Six, The Project Analysis presents the information, results, concluding thoughts of the implemented project. The project would teach children about their spiritual heritage and the Holy Spirit who lives in them. The project would teach about the Holy Spirit speaking to lead and comfort them as believers. The project would seek to investigate if children, when directed and taught about the Spirit of God being alive today, would want to hear

the voice of God? The project's expected outcome would be a personal experience that would deepen the children's understanding of the Spirit of God and prayerfully create a desire to grow closer to God.

Esther Ilnisky, author of the book, *Let the Children Pray*, says, "One quarter of our world is under the age of twelve. If we abort children's rights to become spiritual prayer warriors, we rob them and ourselves of answered prayer. Actually, since children are most affected by our sinful world, isn't it preeminently important that they talk to God themselves?"<sup>7</sup> The Scriptures agree. Jesus, in the Gospels, corrects the disciples about children saying, "But Jesus called them to Him and said, 'Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God'" (Luke 18:16, NKJV). This little group of children in the Disciples of Christ church may develop into little listening ears that start to hear the voice of God in the earth for their generation.

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<sup>7</sup> Esther Ilnisky, *Let the Children Pray* (West Palm Beach, FL: Children's Global Prayer Movement, 2012), 67.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **MINISTRY FOCUS**

#### **Introduction**

The children of the 21<sup>st</sup> century face situations and issues that most adults did not face until young adulthood. Today's children are the victims of traumatic lives. I must list a few: one parent or both incarcerated; one or both parents deceased from war: earthquakes, and/or tsunamis. Children are a part of the repetition of historical events that result in children being forced to live as refugees and victims of terror. Children are being murdered and are murdering. Children are dying from deadly diseases. Children are being raped in the family and out of the family and sold for the sex slave market. Children are being labeled and medicated starting at age three or four for childlike behavior. This short list screams that children need more than ever to know the depth and height of Christ's love and all that His completed work has given to each member of the body of Christ.

Context Associates asked, "Why the need for such a project?" There are three important precepts that impact this project. First this project has the projected opportunity for those called to minister to children to awaken to the greatest challenge of this call: to teach and lead children into an early personal relationship with the Holy Spirit. It is believed by this writer that giving knowledge of the supernatural power at work throughout the Scriptures is crucial. For example, when teaching the account of Creation, the story of Noah's Ark, or David killing the Giant with one stone and other commonly

taught stories to children, teaching them the supernatural power of God at work in all these areas will give children another dimension of depth in their understanding of the Almighty God. Children can learn that God wants to do great things through them. I believe that teaching children how to know the voice of the Holy Spirit, in the midst of the plethora of voices and images, will build in youth a greater conviction about being a Christian. This teaching could also impact the tide of young people losing interest in the church, doubting and questioning why they believe in a God of thousands of years ago, the Son of God or the Holy Spirit.

Secondly, ministry to children matters to me. Today we must be able to provide experiences and develop learning that embraces them as spiritual beings. My faith says there is more to our ministry to children than just our traditions. The addition of spiritual understandings, impartation and incarnation of the Word could yield spiritual, faith-filled children. Children are vulnerable, the most impressionable and often the voiceless members of the church, having the least spiritual depth or worship ability. Many adults find it hard to find words to describe the ministry of children other than “cute,” talented or precious.

In many congregations’ children are sitting with color sheets, headphones and tablets to keep them occupied during the worship service. Some congregations provide a children’s moment where children are called to the front to hear a short character message, usually with an illustration, ending with a prayer and applause. Recently I received a copy of a bookmark given to members of the congregation with suggestions on how to connect with children in worship. The bookmark stated:

During the welcome greet children as well as their parents  
Hand offering plates to children rather than passing it over their heads

Compliment children who have participated and listened attentively during the Service  
 Invite a family with a child to sit on the row with you!

On the back of the bookmark are helpful suggestions for parents:

Help teach worship etiquette; encourage the child to stand at the appropriate times in the service.  
 Share a Bible or hymnal  
 Help your child to keep on track with the bulletin.

Such a hand-out may seem comical, but it is evidence that church leadership is becoming aware of the presence of children in the worship service and are trying to find ways to include them.

The organized, structured church may not be cognizant of the exclusion of part of the body, and children aren't always listed on the church membership rolls. Yet, this crucial ministry is vital and is a source of spiritual blessings and power that the body of Christ needs for it to be fully equipped and whole. Children between the ages of five and twelve, when included in the worship, become a part of the cutting-edge progress of Christianity. For the church to rise we cannot afford to miss the power house of spiritual blessings contained in the earthen vessels called children.

Thirdly, children matter to God. Christian homes, a rapidly decreasing entity, are the first trainers in a child's spiritual journey as a worshipper. The Church and children's teachers then must join with parents in recognizing and training children on their spiritual journey. It is with interest that one can read in Joel 2:14-16 (NKJV) and find a reference to God instructing parents to bring their children to a gathering, a holy assembly, and prepare the children to pray before God! To paraphrase Joel, "Bring everyone, no one is

excluded.”<sup>1</sup> If the church identifies children with their name on the membership roll as members of the body of Christ, then are they not entitled to all the victories of the completed work of Christ as any other believer? One would hope that the answer is a loud resounding, yes! Children need to hear from God, need to communicate with God, and feel the presence of God as much as any adult believer. They, too, have been given the oil of the anointing and are sealed with the power of the Holy Spirit. They, too, can and must operate in the supernatural power of faith in prayer, praise and belief.

Becky Fischer says, “Our desire for our children should be to give them every conceivable advantage to go as far in the Spirit as it is possible to go.”<sup>2</sup> The attack of the enemy does not back-up because they are children. The attacker comes to steal, kill and destroy by whatever means necessary. Quickly, children will fall prey and victim to the attack.

### **Context**

The context for this project is Ray of Hope Christian Church Children’s Ministry. This ministry is a ministry of Ray of Hope Christian Church in Decatur, Georgia, the largest church in the Disciples of Christ denomination. Ray of Hope is a thriving, cutting edge church with an average attendance of twelve hundred per Sunday. The ministry area hosts ninety to a hundred and ten children per Sunday in addition to a nursery of thirty-five to forty per Sunday. The children’s ministry highlights Christian programming for

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<sup>1</sup> Writers quotation

<sup>2</sup> Becky Fischer, *Redefining Children’s Ministry in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, A Call for Radical Change*, (Mandan, ND: Kids in Ministry International, 2008), 112.

ages five to twelve, headed by a minister, coordinators, five volunteer teachers and other volunteer assistants.

Rev. Dr. Cynthia L. Hale is the founding and Senior Pastor of Ray of Hope Christian Church. The church development commission of the Christian Church Disciples decided to start a new church in the Snapfinger-Flat Shoals community of DeKalb County. In November 1985, Rev. Cynthia L. Hale, a native of Roanoke, Virginia and a life-time member of the Disciples of Christ denomination, was called to the position of pastor/developer for the small church in Decatur. In 1986, Rev. Hale began with four others meeting for Bible study in her apartment. Rev. Hale was formally commissioned as pastor/developer on May 4, 1986, and on Sunday, June 29<sup>th</sup> of that year the church began worshipping in the cafeteria of Columbia High School in Decatur, GA. Cynthia Hale was the first African- American female Disciples of Christ church planter. The church has been honored with numerous acknowledgments. To mention one, Ray of Hope Christian Church was honored by the 700 Club as Church of the Week in 2001 and was also recognized in the book, *Excellent Protestant Congregations: Guide to Best Places and Practices*, as one of 300 excellent Protestant congregations in the United States.

The church today worships on 300 acres at 2778 Snapfinger Rd, still in the city of Decatur, Georgia. In year 2016 the church and Rev. Dr. Cynthia Hale will celebrate thirty years of actively seeking the lost, praying and serving in the community. The city of Decatur proudly wore the title of the second richest African-American community in the South in early 2000. The neighborhood has changed somewhat, but still holds its spot among the top ten affluent black communities. The church holds true to this



demographic. Many of the church congregants are university graduates, teachers, dentists, doctors, principals, lawyers and other professionals. The church is predominantly an African-American congregation with perhaps one percent Caucasian, mixed couples and several Mexican- American families. The church leadership, because of who they are as professionals, continue to challenge themselves in ministry to press forward and stay relevant to an ever-transforming present culture. As a part of the Disciples of Christ denomination Ray of Hope historically has programs to teach and guide children into their early spiritual learning. The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Georgia has summer camp programs and their web site states, “camp and conferences provide an opportunity for children, youth and adults to step away from their day-to-day routines and focus more intensely on their relationship with God, to experience Christian community, and to practice living out their spiritual values in a supportive atmosphere.”<sup>3</sup>

In our context, the ministry to children’s ministry program is second to none. In place is a well-developed children’s church, worship and arts component, new members class and Bible Study. We have sought to give children a well-rounded and strong foundation in the Deity of God. Our weekly children’s church service mirrors the adult worship service but all elements of the service are intentionally designed for children. Praise time is free for all children to jump, dance, sing and enjoy. The deacons are assigned to read the Sunday Scripture based on the sermon, as well as leading the children in reciting the mission and vision of the Ray. Testimony time is a special time of

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<sup>3</sup> Disciples of Christ Website, accessed October 20, 2016, [www.gadisciples.org/camp/camp\\_for](http://www.gadisciples.org/camp/camp_for) 2017.

sharing from the children about the things of God they are thankful for in their lives. The time of witness was put in place to train the children how to openly speak their faith in God. It has been my passion to see children recognize and acknowledge that the presence of God was always with them. Testimony time or witnessing begins with a shout out to God, “I thank God” and ends with, “for my parents” or “for my dog,” or “for food” etc. supplied by the child. In this seemingly simple declaration, everyone from five to twelve is empowered to come forward and share their story. And as Pastor, I present a short message and at other times, the message comes from a child’s testimony, a teacher’s testimony or a song. The essence of the service is free flowing and child-friendly (See Appendix A for Children’s Church Order of Worship).

In the ministry to children at Ray of Hope we have embraced the historical reality that the black church provides early development of oratorical skills for black children. Children were taught how to stand, where to stand and how to articulate. Having experienced this same guidance as a child, it served as my first stage and audience experience. I have embraced this format. I believe the ability to speak is essential in the development of children. This one element of testimony in the service has evolved from a three-minute murmur to ten to twelve minutes of praise and exaltation to God and his wonderful works from that week.

Keeping in mind the program goals are to connect and introduce children to Christ as the Son of God, we engage in a weekly forty-minute worship service. The children also participate in outreach events to help them have fun in Christ and invite others to church. One of the ministry events is called the Annual Sock Hop. At the annual Sock Hop the children are encouraged to bring their friends to enjoy a Sunday focused on

loving your neighbor, dancing and singing, to God's Glory. Songs during Sock Hop worship are themed on love; the prayers are centered in loving one another. During the Sock Hop worship service, the message flows with the image of a loving and caring Jesus. Guests are all smiles during the service and enjoy the ministry of indoor/outdoor games, hula hoops, face painting and cupcake decorating. The event culminates with the great dance-off of children and parents wearing wildly decorated socks. The children experience fun, love, safety and the joy of happy feet. This event allows the "church" to be the right place for all the children to see the smile of God as they have fun. This event also serves as time for parents to participate and see the workings of the ministry.

Ministry to children continues in the children's worship and arts area. The choir and dance ministries are in place to develop the voice and the body. Leaders in those areas must be sensitive to the movement of the Holy Spirit. The Scripture is woven into the choir and dance ministries, helping the children to embrace the truth that they, too, can make a joyful noise. The ministry to children is important to the overall ministry of Ray of Hope as it is a service to parents who depend on the availability of children's church to care for their children during the main service times.

Like many churches, the context struggles to open the eyes of adults to recognize the worth of volunteering to help equip and mature our children. The Bible supports adults to talk to the children; the book of Joshua tells this story. When the children of Israel were about to cross the Jordan River into the Promised Land, God tells Joshua to have twelve stones taken from the Jordan. God then instructs them to set a memorial with these twelve stones and the New King James Text says, "When your children ask their fathers in time to come, saying, 'what are these stones?' then you shall let your children

know, saying, ‘Israel crossed over this Jordan on dry land ...’” (Joshua 4: 21-22a, NKJV). Here we have a record of a culturally historical event that God deemed in advance necessary for those yet to come should know. This memorial embodied the action and activities of God. God knew this memorial would spark the inquiries of the children. Therefore, when they would ask what these stones meant, God wanted adults in place to share the miraculous works and wonders of God. There are many stories of faith that support witnessing to children. The important factor is where are the adults who make themselves available to impart this information to the children? Our faith is built through hearing of the Word and by the word of testimony. The ministry at Ray of Hope is constantly trying to enlighten parents that they, too, must participate in this ministry to shape the faith-future of our children. But this desire is not often met because members of the church often view the children as “unworthy spiritual beings.” They hear and may feel the things of the Spirit but little opportunity for inclusion is included. Children grow up watching the Christian tradition.

### **A Ministry Journey**

I began working with children while I was a child. I was the musician for the children’s choir and the small church from the age of nine. I recall learning all the hymns of the church, because they were sung by my mother, grandmother and aunt what seemed daily. I grew up serving in the church in many different areas. One of my first jobs after high school was working as a counselor for Upward Bound Program. I was young, but I was already interacting and communicating hope into children. In 1976, I received my

Bachelor's in Music Education and taught in predominantly Mexican-American and Native-American schools in Arizona. While taking additional education courses I found an interest in counseling adolescents and foster children and became a part of in the juvenile justice system. I have spent years working with children as an educator, both in public and Christian schools, in counseling settings, the juvenile justice system and always in church. Upon leaving public school employment, I spent eight years teaching in Christian schools. This experience gave me the opportunity to teach the "Good News" other than in church. In the Christian school I learned that my actions were the result of a call of destiny to minister to children. This employment gave me the chance to see children in pain, both physical and spiritual. I have observed children at an early age abused, neglected and without hope. Life working with children experiences has allowed me to observe and serve the child who has both parents, seemingly happy well-adjusted children, as well as children crying out for attention and love who get caught up with the wrong crowd.

In 2002, I completed a Masters of Arts in Biblical and Theological Studies at Luther Rice Seminary, Lithonia, GA. concentrating on the New Testament and the teachings of Jesus. I later received a ministerial license from the Disciples of Christ denomination where I was serving at a local church with the children's choir. I was serving as the Minister of Music to children at the context, but also administrating the children's Christian Education programs. The job responsibilities increased to administration of all programs for the children as well as various activities. I was all in and committed to leading children and parents into the saving knowledge of Jesus. I still continued to write music, direct the choir and write and produce drama productions. My

ministry journey involved training others to teach the Bible to children through music and drama.

In my ministry, I have served as music director for large metropolitan congregations and taught national music workshops, and believed my goals and direction were to minister through music education to children as well as adults. The founding and development of a national children's music weekend conference in 2005 was a need, and a means to train children in music as well as network for those adults working with children. I was working as a children's program director for over ten years because it was needed; it was a job. I did not recognize a call to minister or pastor children. My identifying self-marker in 2012 upon completion of a Masters of Divinity concentrating in the area of evangelism prepared me for pastoral ministry.

My skills and ministry interest were ever present before me, but my perception of ministry and the pastorate was from the perception of a traditional clergy position which meant the following: attending to the congregation, praying for the sick, counseling, weddings, and all the trimmings. I was working what John Maxwell calls your emotional passionate commitment. In a recent reading of John C. Maxwell, *The 17 Essential Qualities of a Team Player, Becoming the Kind of Person Every Team Wants*, Maxwell said this about emotional commitment, "Many people tend to associate commitment with their emotions. If they feel the right way, then they can follow through on their commitments... but commitment is not emotion; it's a character quality that enables us to reach our goals...even in the face of adversity."<sup>4</sup> My commitment, although filled with

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<sup>4</sup> John C. Maxwell. *The 17 Essential Qualities of a Team Player, Becoming the Kind of Person Every Team Wants* (Nashville, TN: Maxwell Motivation Inc., Thomas Nelson Publisher, 2002) 23.

emotion, was a character quality to see ministry going on for children. Years of following this fierce commitment altered my perceived destiny into a God ordained call to minister to children.

I have ministered to children for twenty plus years in the Disciples of Christ and other denominations and found a similar focus common for teaching children. Based on personal familiarity with some children's curriculums, most do a great job relaying the stories of the Bible, demonstrating the character of Bible heroes and even relating stories to the present cultural issues that children face. Christ is normally offered to children, to accept him in their heart as Savior and Lord. Children's Bibles and characters are bright, fun and eye catching. Thank God for the thousands of children that have come to Christ by hearing the call by any means necessary.

As my ministry journey continued I operated in music ministry, teaching and pastoring. My position evolved into full-time ministry, supervising a volunteer staff of fifteen to twenty volunteers. The job involved training teachers, setting up classrooms and developing curriculums to follow the teaching of the Pastor. God placed before me the opportunity to care for and develop ways to introduce children to Christ from nursery to age twelve.

The step towards a Doctoral degree seemed to appear. The seed was planted by a United Theological Seminary recruiter while I was in attendance at a Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference. The voice of God, through the recruiter led me to fill out forms and pay the fee for the application. I did not know what had happened. I began to think about it and thought it a very funny idea, a doctorate was too much for me. I found myself at United Theological Seminary listening to God and declaring my identity as a Children's

Pastor and led by the spirit to supernatural ministry focus group. This group would be the leading, guiding hand for me to reach a mark in my destiny. Supernatural ministry exposed me to children ministering in the power of the Holy Spirit, and persons serving boldly as Children's Pastors! Where had I been? I was finally hearing God leading to a project proposal to teach children to hear from God.

Children hear about the supernatural, magic and the mystical almost daily in their early lives. Stories are told and read and shown to children about the magic powers of witches and super heroes as truth. Yet, many parents do not tell the stories of the Bible and explain the power of Holy Spirit. Sadly, parents may not believe in the great super power of God in the Old and New Testaments. It is time to expand our teaching to full 3D and give children the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. My Doctorate in Supernatural Ministry opened a new paradigm for me and will give me a new word and vision for ministry to children. Our ministry to children must carry with it experience of the power of a real, present and living God. The result of ministry to children must result in the ministry of children before they become adults, but also as children capable of ministering to their generation.

### **Nature of the Project**

I have spent hours teaching children Bible stories, singing songs, directing choirs and plays about the wonders of God, similar to how I was taught. I seldom found myself talking about the supernatural power of God to the children. In conversations with other children's Bible teachers, I found most taught the stories and how to memorize Scripture, but not much was put into those stories that reflected the work of the Holy Spirit. I also



found teachers sometimes taking some time to inform about false fire, or magic, or conjuring up some spirit, but only minimally regarding the Holy Spirit of God who is present with us to guide us into all truth. Children are not getting an understanding of the supernatural power of God still at work today.

Helping children to cultivate a listening ear and have an open spirit to the voice of God will direct them to a much-needed affirmation that God still speaks. Proverbs 4:7 says, “Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore, get wisdom and with all thy getting get an understanding” (KJV). Learning to hear from God is getting wisdom and understanding.

In Ephesians 4:11-12 Paul is stating that the saints are to be equipped to work the ministry. If the church neglects to acknowledge the spiritual link in children to God this would question Paul’s statement about equipping the saints. Strong gives this definition of the word, “equipping, *katartismos* (Strong’s # 2677), meaning “a making fit, preparing, training, perfecting, making fully qualified for service.”<sup>5</sup> Paul explains that the church is given gifts that work for all members and all church body members including the children. Neglecting to fully cultivate, equip and nurture the spiritual growth of children, perhaps, has caused the church body to be lacking, and for children to look elsewhere for the supernatural. David Mills, Evangelist, San Jacinto, CA. explains in the “Word Wealth” the word “equipping” this way, “In classical language the word is used for setting a bone during surgery. The great Physician is now making all necessary

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<sup>5</sup> James Strong, LL.D., S.T.D. Strong’s Expanded Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible. *Expanded Dictionary of the Words in the Hebrew Bible* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2010), 133.

adjustments so the church will not be out of joint.”<sup>6</sup> The body of Christ becomes disjointed when children are not trained to hear from God, to worship or to speak their faith. One can only speculate regarding the number of children who have been silenced at an early age when they spoke something unusual, or even behaved in a manner that seemed odd. Children have been known to speak of angels, or express God talking to them, or even praying for parents, and most of these occasions are met with disapproval or dismissal. This disapproval and dismissal has caused children to dismiss the voice of God in their life and to hear the wonders of God as stories that have little to no supernatural power.

We have generations of children that have grown up viewing the magic of Disney, the Wow of FX, the super child wizard “Harry Potter” and hundreds of others without much knowledge of the supernatural Holy Spirit power of a living God. Children with tender minds and hearts absorb with wonder and awe these images set before them by the “Tell-A-Vision.” Prior to today’s technology God placed a “Tell-A-Vision” before the eye of the psalmist. The psalmist saw a view and an understanding of God’s glory in the heavens, the earth and babies in arm. Humankind is invited to see and read the glory of the earth and heavens and join in their witness beginning at infancy. The Psalmist heard the gurgling sounds of infants and exclaimed in wonder how God has placed enough strength in their praise to quiet the enemies of God (Psalm 8:1-2). What image of God has the church set before children that they might have wonder and awe toward a supernatural God?

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<sup>6</sup> David Mills, *Spirit Filled Life Bible, New King James Version*. Jack Hayford Ed. “Word Wealth” (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1991), 1793.

My theme centers on the innate spiritual power in children that the organized church has seemingly neglected to cultivate and train. This writer believes if children were nurtured in learning to hear from God they would become witnesses, helping to enrich and fulfill the work of the body of Christ. The DMin project continued to take shape with guidance from mentors and the peer group. The project was projected to select ten children who would become students of the Holy Spirit in six-sessions of teaching, training and interactive experience. The children would have an opportunity to pray for one another and others. Each session would involve biblical teachings, activity and journaling. The weekly gathering for Children's Church allowed Context Associates and Teacher Assistants to observe and report interactions that occurred organically with deacons and other children around prayer or conversations about things of the Spirit that were not planned. The project plan would be to gather ten children would be between the ages of seven and eleven, who serve as deacons or are being trained to serve for the Ray of Hope Children's Church ministry. The children will be involved in six weeks of Bible Study using Becky Fischer's *Hearing God's Voice (for Kids) Children's Church Curriculum for Ages 6-12*<sup>7</sup> and Jennifer Toledo's *Eyes That See and Ears That Hear*<sup>8</sup> materials and implementing activities. The families will have pre-and post-audio interviews about children praying or hearing from God.

A project like this in a Disciples of Christ Church would result, I believe, in actions that could change the face of ministry directed towards children. One shift in

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<sup>7</sup> Becky Fisher, *Hearing God's Voice (for Kids) Children's Church Curriculum for Ages 6-12*. accessed Jan. 15, 2016. <http://jet.com/product/detail/bf099e12527426ca8f3dcf>.

<sup>8</sup> Jennifer Toledo, *Eyes That See and Ears That Hear, A Parent's Guide to Teaching Their Children How to Hear the Voice of God*. (Dinuba, CA: Global Children's Movement, 2007).

thinking deals with the perception of children. At an early age, our children are faced with many adult concerns: divorce, fights, murder, loss of friends, loss of parents, relatives, loss of shelter, loss of protection, new school, bullies, incest, rape, and a myriad of other adult/child issues. The social system addresses these devastating children issues, and the church teaches them about an ancient God who was powerful, but some children might think where he is now?

Children, as believers, need to be equipped just as the adult believers. Churches' programing often presents classes on prayer, healing, overcoming and other subjects without including children. Children at an early age have been molested by life and have a deep desire and need for the things of God. But this desire is not often met because churches lack in seeing children as "worthy spiritual beings." They hear and may feel the things of the Spirit, such as gifts, callings and workings, but they do not know how to embrace them. What does it mean to them to just believe God? What does it mean to them that God calls them? What does it mean to them to embrace that call from God? There are so many church sayings, for example, "be led by God", "move in the Spirit" and other great Christian buzz words. Children do not know the buzz words. Children are a part of the body of Christ; if this is true then the whole body must be prepared and equipped for the work. Becky Fischer says, "Children should be at the top of the list of potential trainees because they are so teachable and open to new ideas."<sup>9</sup>

Can the children hear the voice of God? If we say "yes" then our training needs to go further than training to be used only in the practical helping roles of the church. Again, Becky Fischer says it's necessary to actually demonstrate how things are done. "It's not

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<sup>9</sup> Fischer, *Redefining*, 60.

enough to tell children they can hear God's voice. They need to be trained what to hear and shown how to listen. It's not enough to tell them Jesus can heal the sick. They need to be shown how to lay hands on the sick themselves."<sup>10</sup> This question comes to mind: how do we grab the heart of the child for Christ? How do we change our teaching to learning that will introduce children to a real Jesus, and to hearing the Holy Spirit who lives and works in them?

Another shift or challenge in developing ministry of children are demonstrations by children that manifest to the body of Christ, an awareness that every child is equipped with the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Not only are children equipped by the Holy Spirit, but they can operate with their gift. He is the power that lives within the child to seal them and deliver them to the Father. The Holy Spirit is the living Spirit of God within us. How will the church body and parents help shape the spiritual lives of children? Our ministry expectations must move from just memorizing the Scripture and learning a speech. The church and parents are challenged to honor the holiness and untapped spiritual voice of children. Children's church can make much needed progress by understanding and encouraging children to pray for one another the prayer of faith. It is vital to spiritual growth that children are taught to lay-on hands and pray for the sick and making it normal to believe in the supernatural power of prayer. It is imperative to teach children that the supernatural aspect of nature, visible to all of us, was created supernaturally; God spoke it all into existence and it's all still here! Now that is truly supernaturally awesome! It sounds like too much, yet the world system thrives on investing in movies that have every element of the supernatural literally jumping off the screen. Every witch, warlock,

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<sup>10</sup> Fischer, *Redefining*, 54.

spell and incantation; every Princess and every frog is magical and all children and parents are drawn in. Children watch witches cast spells and try to imitate them; young girls are led to believe a kiss will be magic; and all of this is great fun. If the church noticed, all of this supernatural behavior is displayed to children as being the norm. Billions of dollars are invested by the world to lure the minds of children at an early, critical age. Marketing and jingles that repeat again and again, seep into the mind endlessly through TV, videos, games, I-Pods and phones. Children are exposed to pornography by the age of eight through some electronic devices and those children exposed to hours of TV watching enjoy commercials that are today called “soft porn.”

We, the Christian community, have attempted some things to try and draw children into the Kingdom. There are new children Christian games, Veggie Tales, and Christian children’s songs, but often with a much smaller budget. All in all, very little written material that is placed in practice in Children’s ministry addresses the power of the Almighty, supernatural God. How easy is it for a child to accept the supernatural God? Recently while reading the record of the birth of Christ from Luke 2 with a group of children (ages six to nine) we paused in the story as I asked the children to retell in their own words the few verses that were shared. One child was very fascinated with the angel who appeared to Mary. After some discussion someone suggested the angel was big, because the angel said “Fear not.” I asked if anyone would be frightened if an angel appeared in our classroom door bright and very large, would anyone run, hide, scream or jump. To my amazement only the oldest children said they would hide. The younger children all said, “they would look at the angel and want to talk to him about God.” They are not afraid of something supernatural, perhaps an indication that they have not been

repressed and hindered and they want to receive! Every record in the Bible has elements of the supernatural power of God; from the Genesis creation story to Revelation's heaven and the return of Christ. The body of Biblical work presses forward and declares the wondrous works of our God.

### **Conclusion**

It is critical that we set the stage for children to hear God and know that it is the voice of the Lord. We must be creating safe places for children to experience the touch, voice and power of the living Savior. Children who are taught to see the supernatural power of God as they are maturing in Christ will truly learn to walk their witness; speak and practice the righteousness of God in the earth. Just as we grow physically, so we should grow spiritually. Spiritual growth is not limited to adults only; children too are a part of the body of Christ, with rights and privileges.

I see shifting the paradigm of children's ministry to more than teaching a method or formula for how to pray, but ministry that exposes children to prayer and praying under the anointing; listening to hear the voice of God; and praying what "thus said the Lord." Many of these things are happening in the lives of the children without anyone helping them to understand the presence of God. In my years of ministry to children I have had children tell me other children wait for them to say something first because what they say is going to happen. Without guidance from the church or parent this child may continue to develop what may be a gift of prophecy or of knowledge. One would be wise and cautious and not leave this child open to tutoring into an ungodly use of their gift. This child may be sought out to do certain things later in life that misuse a God-

given gift. The world system will promote this quickly, if the church's children's ministry misses it. Author Becky Fischer says, "If we want to teach in such a way to have the most results and cause them to love learning about spiritual things, then observing and doing is critical."<sup>11</sup>

How powerful the kingdom becomes as we strengthen the knowledge and experience of children with the Holy Spirit. The context church is currently praying for fearlessness in going after the lost; children must be a part of this prayer command. The church must recognize children who can pray for souls that are lost, children who can pray for their friends to be healed and believe that God can do what He said.

My experience from being a lifetime member of the black church is, often the presence of the Holy Spirit is recognized through shouting, dancing, and laughter. Could this context receive such a display of the Spirit coming from children? What would it look like for a child to prophesy or speak a word of knowledge in the context of a Disciples of Christ Church? This is in the nature of the project. This carefully prepared project will use teaching as a means of cultivating children to hear God's voice and pray for others. This project will explore whether teaching about the Holy Spirit and prayer might excite, delight and lead children to pray. I ask, in this context, would parents be interested in their children learning to pray and expect to hear from God?

The project will provide settings for the group of children to implement what they learned through altar calls during the Children's Church service. The project will be able to see a change in behavior by their willingness to cooperate in sharing through prayer

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<sup>11</sup> Fischer, *Redefining*, 76.



and by witnessing. The project wants to identify what means can effectively cultivate and strengthen children on their spiritual journey.

Children's Church is a power and influence within this context to empower the children to kingdom living. The Word works to develop and equip children with knowledge and boldness for such a time as now. Teaching the children to hear God and pray for others is a bold move for this context. Children will move into worship if the body of Christ will continue to invest time in training and learning how children worship. "Out of the mouth of babes God has given perfect praise" (Psalm 8:2) and this church mistakenly sees children as sweet, cute and precious. They are all of those things, but there is more. Can this ministry begin to shift its paradigm to see children as ministers of the faith, prayer warriors and spiritual beings? The context through this project can teach children to pray for one another and release them to ministry, that would be an extraordinary phenomenon. It takes an army to win the war and the church is in a war. Like everything else with the church, the children are a part of the warring church. Can the children fight in the Spirit realm? Can they learn to speak words of life to others? Yes. Can the children come to the altar to be prayed for and to pray for others? Yes. Can children demonstrate the signs and wonders of an Almighty God? Yes. If the church wants to grab the children for the Kingdom then it needs to tend to the flock. All of the flock.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS**

There is no doubt that children are a part of the body of Christ, having all rights and position in Christ's completed work at the cross. Today's children need help seeing who they are in Christ and help in identifying the inner strength God has ordained in them. In this paper we will examine Scriptures that articulate the spiritual strength that God entrusts to children. God reveals His sovereign will and reign as He chooses to use even children as a demonstration of His power. An examination of the Old Testament Hebrew Scripture, Psalm 8:1-2, (NKJV) "O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is Your name in all the earth, who have set Your glory above the heavens! Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants You have ordained strength, because of Your enemies, that You may silence the enemy and the avenger"<sup>1</sup> provides a foundation for the innate connection of God and children.

My New Testament passage Matthew 18:1-6, will present the teaching and inclusion of children in the ministry of Jesus. In the New Testament Jesus presents the children as the ones to be like in order to enter the Kingdom. Jesus is counter-cultural for His time when it comes to His view of the children.

The Word of God has instructed humankind to "train up the child in the way he should go" (Proverbs 22:6, NKJV). Would God give such a command if it were not

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<sup>1</sup> Psalm 8:1-2, New King James Version Study Bible, all Scripture references in this document are from the NIV, unless otherwise noted, (Grand Rapid, MI: Zondervan Publishers), 1995.

necessary for the development of his will for good in our lives? In Genesis 1:28 I believe God calls children into being in his command to Adam and Eve “to be fruitful and multiply.” God, in His wisdom, commands all creation to “bring forth.” All creation was designed to bring forth its own kind. The laws of genetics were so important to God that He established it in each living creature; insects, sea creatures, birds, land animals and humankind. The initiation of offspring was officially established by God to fill the earth, subdue it and have dominion over it. Dominion, subduing and filling is for the smallest to the largest, from the oldest to the youngest. What are the implications of this statement? The writer reasons that humankind is the offspring of God, created in God’s image/likeness (Genesis 1:26). In God’s wisdom and perfect design, God placed in humanity the ability to reproduce more children created in the image/likeness of God.

God has known us before we were born (Jeremiah 1:5) and has plans to prosper and not harm; and to give each one a future, (Paraphrased, Jeremiah 29:11). God has instituted precepts, laws, monuments and traditions requiring that parents would use them as a means to give children knowledge of God and God’s acts towards humanity. God has a reason for children; they matter to God and to the church. The challenge for the ministry of children today on how to go deeper and open the door for children to see, to hear the voice of God, and get to know that God is real. Becky Fischer believes, “If children can be taught what His voice sounds like, and how to recognize His leading, they will be much better equipped to make right choices that affect their entire lives.”<sup>2</sup> Because God has no respect of persons, children are chosen vessels of God in the

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<sup>2</sup> Becky Fischer. *Hearing God’s Voice (for Kids) Children’s Church Curriculum for Ages 6-12*, accessed January 15, 2016. <http://jet.com/product/detail/bf099e12527426ca8f3dcf>.

making. Children have the ability to see the revelation of God. Children's minds are uncorrupted and unmolested by the tricks and trappings of life making it easier for them to embrace the reality of a God who reveals Himself in all ways.

This paper addresses the statement that children matter to the body of Christ and that by impacting their spiritual growth their lives will be changed and their ministry to children will be immeasurable. God's command is more than to minister to children, there is also a God-view of children ministering. Is the church paradigm in need of a shift to align itself to see children through God's eyes as strength and perfect praise?

## **Old Testament Passage History**

### **Translations**

In the Old Testament David pens our discussion Scripture, Psalm 8:1-2, like this:  
quoted are three translations of the Holy Bible.

O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is your name in all the earth. Who have set your glory above the heavens? Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants you have ordained strength, Because of your enemies, that you may silence the enemy and the avenger (NKJV).

O Lord our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth!  
You have set your glory above the heavens. Out of the mouths of babes and infants you have founded a bulwark because of your foes, to silence the enemy and the avenger (NRSV).

God, brilliant Lord, yours is a household name.  
Nursing infants gurgle choruses about you; Toddlers shout the songs  
That drown out enemy talk, And silence atheist babble. Message Bible (MSG).

The book of Psalms is a compilation of several ancient collections of Hebrew songs and poetry for use in congregational worship as well as in private devotion. The

Psalms offers a look into the inner life of the community of Israel. In the “Introduction to the Psalms” from the *New Interpreter’s Study Bible RSV*, Toni Craven Professor of Hebrew Bible, Brite Divinity School states, “Some of the Psalms are intended as communal, some official acts of praise or petition. Others offer intimate detail of pain, fears, delights and hopes of individuals ... They are a poetic discourse between Israel and God, who is said to hear and answer.”<sup>3</sup> Gleason L. Archer, professor emeritus of Old Testament and Semitic languages, says, “The Hebrew title for this book is *Tehillim*, meaning ‘Praise songs’ the Greek rendering is *Psalmoi*; in the Septuagint it literally means ‘songs’ to the accompaniment of a stringed instrument.”<sup>4</sup>

To date the book of Psalms seems to offer some challenges to scholars but most say the book covers a wide time span. Wilkerson in his book, *Talk Thru the Old Testament*, dates the book from Moses (c. 1401 B.C.) to the post exilic community under Ezra and Nehemiah (c. 430 B.C.) and, “because of this broad chronological and thematic range there are different audiences under many diverse conditions. They therefore reflect a multitude of moods and as such are relevant to every reader.”<sup>5</sup> This present-day collection of collections represents the final stage of the edition. The book of Psalms has served as the prayer book, the book of praise and religious instruction, and would have

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<sup>3</sup> Toni Craven, “Introduction to the Psalms,” *The New Interpreter’s Study Bible, New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha*, Walter J. Harrelson Ed. Donald Senior, Associate Ed. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2003), 749.

<sup>4</sup> Gleason L Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction, Revised and Expanded* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1994), 487.

<sup>5</sup> Bob Wilkinson and Kenneth Boa, *Talk Thru the Old Testament Vol.1*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1983), 152.

been known by the post exilic temple personnel as the “writings.” Gleason Archer believes it is valid to generalize and safely say that,

Most or nearly all of the psalms embody at least an element of personal response on the part of the believer toward the sovereign goodness and grace of God. Often, they include a record of the psalmist’s own inner emotions of discouragement, anxiety, or thankful joy in the face of the opposition of God’s enemies or in view of God’s varied providences.<sup>6</sup>

One could say that the dominant message of Scripture, not just the Psalms, is that God is the sovereign Lord over all creation. It would seem to be true that many passages of Scripture, especially the Psalms, declare that creation reflects the splendor and glory of God. God is the master designer of the universe.

### **Authorship/Book Structure**

K. R. Iverson, Senior Pastor of Bible Temple writes, “The book of Psalms was edited in its present form with several variations by the time the Greek Septuagint was translated from the Hebrew, a few centuries before the advent of Christ.”<sup>7</sup> In its final form as well as in ancient times the Psalter seems to have been divided into five books with each division ending with a doxology. For this discussion from Psalm 8, it comes from Book I (Psalm:1- 41) and most of these songs are attributed to David. “There are skeptical views and critics that tend to reject the possibility, on theoretical grounds, that David could have composed any of the Psalms,”<sup>8</sup> says Gleason Archer. He goes on to highlight three areas of concern:

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<sup>6</sup> Archer, *A Survey*, 487.

<sup>7</sup> K.R., Iverson. “Introduction to Psalms.” *Spirit Filled Life, Bible New King James Version* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1991), 750.

<sup>8</sup> Archer, *A Survey*, 488.

(1) The King would not speak of himself in third person, but rather first person, as I. (2) David allegedly refers to Israel's sanctuary as a temple structure already built, even though this edifice was not erected until the reign of Solomon, David's successor. And (3) the historical David could hardly have found leisure to compose poetry, because his life was so filled with practical affairs; nor would he have had the inclination to such a refined, cultural pursuit.<sup>9</sup>

Much of this criticism also has counter claims that support David as the author of this book. Archer notes:

In 1 Samuel 16:18 we see clearly that according to the ancient Hebrew Author, it was possible for a really talented man to combine the professions of war and music: "Behold, I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite, that is cunning in playing, a mighty valiant man, and a man of war and prudent in matters, and a comely person, and the Lord is with him."<sup>10</sup>

It is worth noting that in the New Testament, Jesus speaks of the Psalms of David as do the Apostles. This also lends authority to the authorship of David. The Psalms are broken down into books as follows:

Book I (Ps.1-41) most of these are songs attributed to David.

Book II (Ps. 42-72), is attributed to the sons of Korah, Asaph, David and Solomon.

Book III (Ps.73-89) is a large collection of Asaph's songs, he was David's choirmaster. "These two books could have been prepared for publication and certainly for liturgical use in the temple under Hezekiah's sponsorship.

Book IV (Ps. 90-106) are without given authors, Moses, David and Solomon are contributors.

Book V (Ps.146-150) songs called the Egyptian Hallel. The great Hallel, each song beginning and ending with Hallelujah!<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Archer, *A Survey*, 489.

<sup>10</sup> Archer, *A Survey*, 490.

<sup>11</sup> K. R. Iverson, "Introduction," 751.

For our discussion on Psalm 8 we will work with the statement that it is a Psalm written by David, the shepherd who was anointed King of Israel.

Archer gives further clarity on the numeration of the Psalms in his “Introduction to the Psalms.” He says, “The numeration of the Psalms in both the Masoretic Text of the Old Testament (Hebrew) and the LXX Septuagint contain a total of 150 psalms.”<sup>12</sup> It is uncertain if this was the original number. The Talmud (Sabbath 16) speaks of 147, one for each year of life of the Patriarch Jacob. There are also other uncertainties about the original division of the Psalms.

Psalms also uses subheadings or superscriptions preceding each Psalm. These can refer to the musical instruments that accompany the Psalm or to which part the choir would lead. As Iverson notes, “Informative subheading are found at the beginning of many of the Psalm. The Hebrew preposition used in many of the subheading can be translated three ways: “to,” “for,” and “of”<sup>13</sup> These help the reader understand who the Psalm was written to, for and who it belongs to. John H. Stek, Associate Editor and writer to “Introduction to Psalms” NIV study Bible goes on to say “The superscriptions to the Psalms acquaint us with an ancient system of classification, *tephillah* (prayer) *Tehillah* (praise in singing)”<sup>14</sup> to give some examples. These classifications, although some of the meanings are still being considered, are useful for clarity in studying the Psalms.

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<sup>12</sup> Archer, *Survey*, 496.

<sup>13</sup> Iverson, “Introduction,” 751.

<sup>14</sup> John Stek, “Introduction to Psalms.” *New International Version Study Bible*, Kenneth Barker, Ed (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 773.



*Selah*, is a word used often in the Psalms. John H. Stek, one of the Associate editors of the *New International Version Study Bible* says, “the word *Selah* is found in 39 Psalms most of which are in books one and three. This could be a musical notation or it is suggested that it means a call for a brief musical interlude or for a brief liturgical response by the congregation.”<sup>15</sup> This information gives us an understandable glance about the book of Psalms.

### **Theology in Psalms**

The theology of the book, perhaps, from the final collectors had to be seen or understood in light of the whole of the Biblical revelation in the Hebrew Scriptures. The songs of Psalms do not appear to be randomly ordered. The works appear to be in clusters that have profound existential and theological implications. In the Psalms there are Hymns and laments (Psalms. 44, 74, 79, 80, and 83) Royal Psalms, and songs of thanksgiving. Archer notes that “The Form Critical approach from scholars such as Eissfeldt, Oesterley and Sigmund Mowinckel in the (*Psalmen Studien*, 1921-14) extended another group called, ‘enthronement Psalms’ that are believed to have originated in connection with the yearly celebration of the enthronement of Yahweh.”<sup>16</sup>

In the *NIV Study Bible*, Stek writes further comments:

At the core of the theology of the Psalter is the conviction that the gravitational center of life (of right human understanding, trust, hope, service, morality, adoration), but also of history and of the whole creation is God (*Yahweh*, “the LORD”). He is the great King overall and the one to whom all things are subject. He created all things and preserves them; they are the robe of glory with which he has clothed himself. Because He maintains them, they are sustained and kept

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<sup>15</sup> Stek, “Introduction to Psalms,” 776

<sup>16</sup> Archer, *Survey*, 495.

secure from disruption, confusion or annihilation ... As the Great King by right of creation and enduring absolute sovereignty, he ultimately will not tolerate any worldly power that opposes or denies or ignores Him.<sup>17</sup>

Unquestionably the kingship of Yahweh is the basic metaphor and most pervasive theological concept in the Psalms. My thought on most of the Psalms is that they were for the worshipping community and especially the songs of High praise ending in Hallel!

A look at the sequence of this Psalm, or where it has been placed in the order, will give some light to our discussion. Craven, states the position of this Psalm is noteworthy, “This Psalm is the first hymn in the Psalter and follows a series of five prayers of individuals for God’s help with enemies of one sort or another (Ps 3-7).”<sup>18</sup> Another writer, Marvin Tate, Old Testament Interpretation Professor, at Southern Baptist Theological seminary says,

The canonical position of this psalm seems important, because it follows the laments in Psalms 3 through 7 and is followed in turn by the twin Psalms 9-10, which focus on the kingship of Yahweh: ‘Yahweh is King forever and ever’ (Ps 10:16). Psalms 9-10 also serve as an elongated supplement to Psalm 8, which does not explicitly refer to the kingship of Yahweh but is replete with the language and thought of the royal qualities of divine monarchy.<sup>19</sup>

With this understanding of the book of Psalms, let’s closely examine our Biblical Context Psalm chapter 8 verses 1 and 2, to find in evidence in my belief that children have innate spiritual gifts ordained by God to minister to the body of Christ.

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<sup>17</sup> Stek, “Introduction to Psalms,” 776.

<sup>18</sup> Craven, *Interpreter’s Study Bible*, 758.

<sup>19</sup> Marvin Tate E, 2001. “Exposition of Psalm 8.” 343-359, *Journal of the NABPR, Perspectives in Religious Studies* 28, accessed February 26, 2016, *Old Testament Abstracts*, EBSCOhost.

At the beginning of Psalm 8 there is a superscription for the director of music. As a Psalm of David, Stek says, “This is probably a liturgical notation, indicating either that the psalm was to be added to the collection of works to be used by the director of music in Israel’s worship, or when used in the temple it was to be spoken by the leader of the Levitical choir.”<sup>20</sup> Stek notes, “The *gittith* is possibly a stringed instrument such as the harp referred to as the Harp of Gath, or lyre that could be used to accompany this Psalm.”<sup>21</sup>

The first verse of this Psalm opens with “O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!” (NIV) and “O LORD, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth!” (NRSV).

The Psalm opens up in praise of God’s name and majesty over all the earth. The psalmist sees the moon and stars and seems to be moved by the sovereign ordering of creation by God. This Psalm invokes my imagination to wonder if David could have been lying outside looking up into the heavens. Stek, provides this thought, “David speaks out of his present experience of reality; watching a night sky with a vast host of heavenly light, stretching from horizon to horizon; and his inner thoughts are engaged to wonder and awe, taking him from the everyday affairs.”<sup>22</sup> Perhaps David is praising God, as a relief from stress, and declaring the Lord’s name is all majestic and over the earth. David could have had a praise moment addressing God and celebrating Him. Just to read these words one could say verse one sounds like praise, as in a song, proclaiming the majesty of the Lord’s name in the all earth.

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<sup>20</sup> Stek, “Introduction to the Psalms,” 782.

<sup>21</sup> Stek, “Introduction to the Psalms,” 782.

<sup>22</sup> Stek “Introduction to the Psalms” 786.

In his *Exposition of Psalm 8*, Tate points to the opening of the Psalm in an effort to identify its structure: “The Psalm opens with a direct address to God in the manner that is common in lament/complaint Psalms: ‘O *Yahweh*, our LORD.’”<sup>23</sup> Tate particularly points to the first words, “LORD, our Lord” (NKJV) as suggesting that the author of the Psalm is reflecting on both a personal God as well as the sovereign and majestic God. These aspects of the Psalm are, for Tate, why “most commentators agree that this Psalm belongs to the genre of hymnic praise,”<sup>24</sup> which is one of the many possible structural genres scholars have used to describe various groups of Psalms. As Tate continues his discussion of the structure of Psalm 8, he engages in a significant discussion from another Old Testament scholar, Erhard Gerstenberger:

. . . Gerstenberger thinks that in this Psalm "we meet with a congregational structure, with autonomous local communities held together by a class of clergy that can be identified by its sapiential theology." He argues that the "spiritual outlook" of the psalm is "the hallmark of early Jewish scribes and rabbis who organized Israel's congregations after the Babylonian period." He tries to strengthen his case by appealing to a part of Elihu's speech in Job 35:9-11 in which Elihu declares:

Because of the multitude of oppressions, people cry out: they call for help because of the arm of the mighty.  
But no one says, “Where is God my Maker,”  
who gives songs in the night,  
who teaches us more than the animals of the earth,  
and makes us wiser than the birds of the air? (NRSV).<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Marvin E. Tate, “An Exposition of Psalm 8” 28.

<sup>24</sup> Tate, “Psalm 8,” 345. Here Tate refers, in his footnotes, to the author Erhard S. Gerstenberger, for a list of these “commentators.” See, therefore: Erhard S. Gerstenberger, *Psalms Part I: With an Introduction to Cultic Poetry* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988) 70.

<sup>25</sup> Tate, “Psalm 8,” 346. For the quotes and ideas of Gerstenberger which Tate used in this discussion see: Gerstenberger, *Psalms*, Part I, 71.

This discussion denotes David could have reflected his statements at night. Tate continues to quote Gerstenberger.

These words suggest a night time context of singing God's praise as a way to overcome fear and oppression, which may relate well to Psalm 8, since it seems to suppose a night setting (the sun is missing in v. 3). This interpretation is learned conjecture, of course, but it is reasonable in the larger context of the Old Testament.<sup>26</sup>

Continuing the analysis of 1<sup>b</sup>, “you have set your glory above the heavens.”

Craven in the *New Interpreters Study Bible* study notes adds, “Here we see David is meditating on the glory of God, he sees creation in a descending spatial hierarchy that begins above the heavens, moves to the moon and the stars, and then focuses on humans and the earth creatures.”<sup>27</sup> The earth is under humanity’s care which was authorized by God. Marvin Tate, in his *Perspectives in Religious Studies about Psalm 8* says, “There is no certainty in regard to the reading, but the general meaning of the establishment of the power of Yahweh above the heavens as a counterpart of the ‘majesty’ of the divine name on the earth seems to be an acceptable interpretation.”<sup>28</sup>

In verse 2 there are only slight differences in these two versions: “From the lips of children and infants” (NIV) and “Out of the mouth of babes and infants” (NRSV). These words of David seem to say that God has appointed praise from babies/infants, perhaps so young that they are still nursing from their mothers. But Toni Craven says, “This statement on infants and babes is unclear and asked these questions in the NRSV study

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<sup>26</sup> Marvin, Tate, “An Exposition on Psalm 8” *Journal of NABPR, Perspectives in Religious Studies*, (Waco, Tex.: Word, 1983) 106; For a possible night ceremony, see Kraus, *Psalms 1-59*, 179; Claus Wester Mann, *The Living Psalms*, trans. J. R. Porter accessed March 4, 2016 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989) 263,

<sup>27</sup> Craven, *Interpreter's*, 758.

<sup>28</sup> Tate, “An Exposition on Psalm 8,” 350.

notes, “Does the praise of children have the power to silence foes? Or does verse 2<sup>a</sup> continue verse 1<sup>b</sup> so that even children recognize God’s majesty in the earth? Or does the psalmist celebrate the power of human speech present even with the earliest beginnings of speech?”<sup>29</sup>

### **Babes and Suckling’s**

From the *Ellicott’s Commentary for English Readers* the words “babes and sucklings” is defined:

Better, rendered as young children and sucklings”. A regular phrase to describe children from one to three years old (1 Samuel 15:3; 1 Samuel 22:19). The yonek, or suckling, denotes an earlier stage of the nursing period (which, with Hebrew mothers, sometimes extended over three years, 2 Maccabees 7:27, and on Talmudic authority could not be less than two years) than the ôlel, which is applied to children able to play about on the streets (Jeremiah 9:21; Lamentations 4:4).<sup>30</sup>

Clearly David moves from the great sovereign God of heaven to babes and sucklings, yet this seems almost out of place. He moves from power to something that seemingly has little power. Is it possible that our God whose glory is across the heavens has appointed praise to come from children that will silence the dark powers arrayed against Himself, God? Or is it also that the purity of children’s praise is filled with authority like God’s own glory and power? What power must be in the speech, or voices of these babes! Quoting John Wesley’s *Explanatory Notes*, “Ps. 8:2, Out of the mouth of

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<sup>29</sup> Craven, *The New Interpreter’s Study Bible*, 759.

<sup>30</sup> *Ellicott’s Commentary for English Readers*, accessed March 10, 2016 [www.biblehub.com/commentaries/psalms/8-2.htm](http://www.biblehub.com/commentaries/psalms/8-2.htm).

babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength because of thine enemies, that thou mightest still the enemy and the avenger.”<sup>31</sup>

The *Expositor's Bible Commentary* describes it further in this manner:

The sudden drop from the glories of the heavens to the babble and prattle of infancy and childhood is most impressive and gives extraordinary force to the paradox that the latter's witness is more powerful to silence gainsayers than that of the former. This conviction is expressed in a noble metaphor, which is blurred by the rendering 'strength.'<sup>32</sup>

John Wesley comments on the term “babes,”

“*Babes* — Weak and foolish, and contemptible persons, who are frequently called babes or children. Such are very unfit to grapple with an enemy: and therefore, when such persons conquer the most powerful and malicious enemies, it must needs confound them, and advance the glory of God: as indeed it did, when such mean [lowly] persons as the apostles, and disciples of Christ, maintained and propagated the gospel, in spite of all the wit, power, and rage of their enemies.”<sup>33</sup>

Two versions report that babes/infants/children/and sucklings are positioned and ordained by God. Wesley adds his comments describing babes as weak and foolish yet still confounding the enemy and advancing the glory of God. There are three words that are used to describe what God can do with what comes from the mouth of the children. We have the words founded, established and ordained;

Out of the mouth of babes and infants you have founded a bulwark (NRSV).

Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength (KJV).

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<sup>31</sup> John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes*, “Psalm 8,” accessed March 9, 2016, [www.christnotes.org Bible Commentary](http://www.christnotes.org/Bible%20Commentary).

<sup>32</sup> *Expository Bible Commentary*, accessed March 9, 2016, [www.biblehub.com/commentaries/Psalm 8](http://www.biblehub.com/commentaries/Psalm%208).

<sup>33</sup> John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes*, “Psalm 8,” accessed March 9, 2016, [www.christnotes.org Bible Commentary](http://www.christnotes.org/Bible%20Commentary).

Through the praise of children and infants you have established a stronghold against your enemies (NIV).

“Ordained” noted in the KJV is defined by John Wesley in his *Explanatory Notes*:

“Perfectly or firmly settled strength; that is, the praise of his strength or power.”<sup>34</sup>

The *Ellicott’s Commentary for English Readers* expands our information on “ordained.”

Ellicott’s says,

Ordained strength . . . — “at first glance, the LXX translation, as quoted in Matthew 21:16 (NIV) “Thou hast perfected praise,” seems to be correct, from a comparison with Psalm 29:1, where strength translates the same Hebrew word, and plainly means homage. This express, doubtless, part of the thought of the poet, that in a child’s simple and innocent wonder lies the truest worship; that God accomplishes the greatest things and reveals His glory by means of the weakest instruments—a thought which was seized upon by our Lord to condemn the want of spirituality in the scribes and Pharisees. But the context, speaking the language of war, seems to demand the primitive meaning, stronghold or defense. The truth which the Bible proclaims of the innate divinity of man, his essential likeness to God, is the principal subject of the poet; and in the princely heart of innocence of an unspoiled child he sees, as Wordsworth saw, its confirmation. ‘Trailing clouds of glory do we come, From God who is our home?’ Such a proof is strong even against the noisy clamor of apostate men, who rebel against the Divine government, and lay upon God the blame of their aberration from His order. ‘His merry babbling mouth provides a defense of the Creator against all the calumnies of the foe’ (Ewald). Others think rather of the faculty of speech, and the wonder and glory of it.”<sup>35</sup>

Marvin Tate says, “The nature of the strength comes from the praise.”<sup>36</sup>

This writer adds that through this strength God has placed children and babes in a position to subdue his enemies; he has involved the children in war, giving them his strength. God has given them an ordination of power. He is the sovereign God and can do just that. The *Benson Bible Commentary* reads as follows about babes and sucklings:

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<sup>34</sup> John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes*, “Psalm 8.” 1.

<sup>35</sup> *Ellicott’s Commentary for English Readers*, accessed March 10, 2016 [www.biblehub.com/commentaries/psalms/8:1-2](http://www.biblehub.com/commentaries/psalms/8:1-2).

<sup>36</sup> Tate, “An Exposition on Psalm 8.” 356.



Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings — “Children in age, and children in power and knowledge, persons comparatively ignorant and foolish, weak and contemptible, but simple, humble, and teachable; thou hast ordained strength — Hebrew, יסדתנו, jissadta gnoz, literally, hast founded, or constituted strength, hast laid a foundation for effecting, and hast actually effected, great and important purposes. Bishop Patrick, Dr. Hammond, Dr. Dodd, and some others think that there is an allusion in these words to the case of David himself, who, though but a mere child, in comparison to Goliath, yet, being assisted by the power of God, gained a complete victory over that gigantic champion; which was not only a proper punishment of his proud boastings, and defiance of the armies of the living God, but likewise sufficient to make the whole army of the Philistines acknowledge and adore the omnipotence of the God of Israel in reverential silence, at the same time that it discomfited and put them to flight.”<sup>37</sup>

God’s ways and thoughts are higher than man’s, and I believe in this moment, David is given divine revelation of the sovereignty, the glory, and strength of God. According to the *Expositors Commentary*:

God builds a tower of strength, which, like some border castle, will bridle and still the restless enemy. There seems no sufficient reason for taking "children and sucklings" in any but its natural meaning, however the reference to lowly believers may accord with the Spirit of the psalm. The children’s voices are taken as a type of feeble instruments, which are yet strong enough to silence the enemy. Childhood, "with no language but a cry," is, if rightly regarded in its source, its budding possibilities, its dependence, its growth, a more potent witness to a more wondrous name than are all the stars. In like manner, man is man’s clearest revelation of God. The more lowly he is, the more lofty his testimony. What are all His servants’ words but the babbling of children who "do not know half the deep things they speak"? God’s strongest fortress is built of weakest stones.<sup>38</sup>

As we continue to familiarize ourselves with the idea of children being spiritual beings, ordained to strength and power by God, Psalm 8 is referenced by Jesus in the New Testament. The occasion is Jesus in the Jerusalem Temple healing the sick and those who came to him. Jesus had previously enraged the priests and elders by riding into

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<sup>37</sup> *Benson Bible Commentary*, accessed March 10, 2016, [www.Biblehub.com/commentaries/Psalms 8:1-2](http://www.Biblehub.com/commentaries/Psalms 8:1-2).

<sup>38</sup> *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, accessed March 1, 2016, [www.Biblehub.com/commentaries/Psalms 8:1-2](http://www.Biblehub.com/commentaries/Psalms 8:1-2).

the city like royalty to the shouts of the people and children saying, “Hosanna thou Son of David.” Jesus further enrages the indignant temple priests and frightens his disciples by overturning the tables of the money-changers. Now he is in the Temple healing and the children are singing and rejoicing at the miracles He performs. In the book of Matthew versions NIV and NRSV we read of Jesus quoting Psalm 8:

Matthew 21:14 -16, “The blind and the lame came to him at the temple, and he healed them. But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did and the children shouting in the temple area, “Hosanna to the son of David,” and they were indignant. “Do you hear what these children are saying?” they asked him. “Yes,” replied Jesus, “have you never read, ‘from the lips of children and infants you, Lord, have called forth your praise’?” (NIV).

Again, the NRSV presents Jesus making the same direct quote of Psalm 8: 2:

The blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he cured them. But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the amazing things that he did, and heard the children crying out in the temple, “Hosanna to the Son of David,” they became angry and said to him, “do you hear what these are saying?” Jesus said to them, “Yes; have you never read, ‘out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise for yourself?’” Matthew 21:14-16 (NRSV).

Wil Pounds, Director of Missions at Abide in Christ, in his writings on *Christ in the*

*Psalms* describes the children in the street this way:

This was not a children’s choir, trained by the temple leaders. This was a band of ordinary children in the streets of Jerusalem who happened to be there at the time Jesus healed the blind and the lame. However, when these children saw these wonderful things they began to cry out, “Praise be to the Son of David! Hosanna to the Son of David!” the scribes and the chief priest were indignant. They thought Jesus ought to silence these children. Instead he said, “These are the ones who comprehend the truth and the will of God. They understand that here is being manifested the healing power of God.”<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Wil Pounds, *Christ in the Psalms: God’s Glory Perfectly Revealed in the Son of Man*. accessed March 14, 2016, <http://www.abideinchrist.com/messages/psa8v1.html>.

Jesus points to children as an example of the recognition of God's power to silence his enemy, fulfilling the Old Testament Scripture.

To complete the Old Testament reading of Psalm 8:2b from the NRSV it reads, "You have founded a bulwark." This word can refer to "ramparts" or "fortifications," but it is most frequently used with the idea of "might/strength." Tate comments:

In some cases, the sense connotes the idea of "refuge" or "protection," and this would fit well in Psalm 8 in (1) the context of protection from enemies in v. 2 and (2) in the canonical context of Yahweh as a "refuge" in Psalms 3-14. However, in the creation context of Psalm 8, "strength" or "might" seems good. This choice, of course, depends upon the identity of the enemies in v. 2b, who are specified as the foes of Yahweh in the present text. They are not further identified, but it is reasonable to think of beings and forces, human and nonhuman, seeking to impede or thwart the purpose of Yahweh in creation especially in the divine intent for humanity as set forth in Ps. 4-8. Perhaps in Psalm 8 we should think of both "strength" and "refuge;" they are not contradictory in this context.<sup>40</sup>

According to Wesley's *Explanatory Notes* the word "Avenger" means — "the devil, and all who are his vassals and espouse his quarrel."<sup>41</sup> The *Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges* commentary states:

The general sense is plain. Jehovah has ordained that even the feeblest representatives of humanity should be His champions to confound and silence those who oppose His kingdom and deny His goodness and providential government. The mystery of man, of a being made in the image of God to know God, is greater than the mystery of the heavens, with all their immensity and majesty, as truly as the spiritual and eternal is greater than the material and temporal. Man therefore, even in the weakness of childhood, is a witness of the existence and character of God. But *how* is the testimony uttered? The words must not be prosaically defined and limited. The inarticulate, unspoken testimony to its Creator borne by the mere existence of the infant with its wonderful instincts and capacities for development; the powers of reason and thought and speech; the exercise of these powers in the praise of God with the simple faith of childhood; all are included. Nor is it mere poetic fancy to say that:

"Trailing clouds of glory do we come,

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<sup>40</sup> Tate, "Exposition of Psalm 8," 351.

<sup>41</sup> *Wesley Notes*, accessed March 9, 2016, christnotes.org.

From God, who is our home,  
and that 'Heaven lies about us in our infancy.'"<sup>42</sup>

In the Hebrew Scripture of Psalm 8 one could understand the splendor of an awesome God whose sovereignty orders and ordains according to God's will. If Yahweh wants a fortress He can use the mouth of babes and infants, who appear weak and in a helpless condition, as communicators of strength to silence His enemies. This biblical reference is clear that there is God-given power to children, powerful enough to the pulling down of strongholds and shutting the mouths of God's enemies. God enemies are also the enemy to the church.

The children who are in training as deacons at Ray of Hope's children's ministry, are servants in the house of the Lord and are learning how to stand as examples of Christ. They learn to recite the Scriptures, pray and serve others. The children are being well equipped in the structure, works and ordinances of the organized church. But, will this training help them to have a personal relationship with God through hearing from him and learning to follow his voice? If my reading of various statistics, children begin to become disinterested in church by the age of eleven or twelve and start skipping church for the lure of games, shows, day parties and the like. Young people by their teen years and as they complete high school often finally leave the church. Now it is time to push the envelope and present more. Spiritual gifts dwelling in children must be acknowledged and nurtured. It is time for children to understand there is more and God is real, he still speaks, he still heals and he still works daily on our behalf. Training them must include a

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<sup>42</sup> "Psalm 8." *Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges*, accessed March 11, 2016, [www.BibleHub.com/commentaries](http://www.BibleHub.com/commentaries).

component to help cultivate an ear for hearing God and develop a relationship that results in children equipped to minister to the body of Christ with the words God places in their mouths!

Becky Fischer, in her book, *Redefining Children's Ministry in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* says:

Children are never too young to begin being trained. However, they will only go as far as we believe they can go, and as far as we are willing to invest time in their training. God needs our kids to be actively involved in His kingdom business. We need them, and the world needs them.<sup>43</sup>

Esther Ilnisky, in her book, *Let the Children Pray* says,

Children can always be made free to pray. Here's what you need to keep in mind to release them: Validate their personhood ... acknowledge their spirituality once it's settled that children are spiritual beings, they will be perceived to be not only made 'after the flesh, but after the Spirit.' Recognize and be convinced of their God-given right to be intercessors, beyond the traditional boundary of reciting sweet little prayers.<sup>44</sup>

### **New Testament Reading**

At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"<sup>2</sup> Then Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them,<sup>3</sup> and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.<sup>4</sup> Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.<sup>5</sup> Whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me.<sup>6</sup> if you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea. Matthew 18: 1-6 (NKJV).

Matthew is our central text of discussion but the passage is also found in the Gospel of Luke and Mark, relating this same incident of Jesus and his disciples. Jesus can be seen as teacher in this passage, attempting to open the eyes of his closest followers to

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<sup>43</sup> Fischer, *Redefining*, 176.

<sup>44</sup> Esther Ilnisky, *Let the Children Pray*. (West Palm Beach, FL: Children's Global Prayer Movement, 2012), 75.

himself, his message and the kingdom. In the New International Version, Luke's Gospel says it this way:

<sup>46</sup>An argument started among the disciples as to which of them would be the greatest. <sup>47</sup>Jesus, knowing their thoughts took a little child and had him stand beside him. <sup>48</sup> Then He said to them, whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. For he who is least among you all -he is the greatest. Luke 9:46-49 (NIV)

Luke is referring to the same occasion but, we note that Luke uses “welcomes” in place of “receives” and does not mention conversion, or the consequences of neglect for mistreatment of the little ones. Yet, the important factor still remains the child is seen as the least, but he is the greatest ... be like him.

The New Revised Standard Version clearly states all criteria for the question, “who is the greatest?” In this version, the word “change” is used for conversion, along with the phrase, “become like the child in humbleness to enter the kingdom.” The word “welcomes” also used suggests greet or receive kindly, describing how to receive the child, and that to receive the child is as to receive Christ. This version gives us strong language to the consequences of blocking the little ones:

At the time, the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of Heaven?” He called a child, whom he put among them and said, “Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. <sup>4</sup>Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. <sup>5</sup>Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me. <sup>6</sup>If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea.” (Matthew 18: 1-6, NRSV).

Each New Testament reading reminds us of the arrogance of mankind. Mankind is often self-seeking, focusing importance on self, and always vying for position. It seems interesting that the text is significant enough that it is shared in three of the Gospels.

Perhaps it is a testament to the possible profound confusion of the disciples upon hearing these words, as well as the profound wisdom of God to confuse the wise with what seems to be the foolish. John Carroll, Professor of the New Testament, at Union Presbyterian Seminary, writes in his “Abstract” *Journal of Bible and Theology*, “In the Gospels Jesus points to children as patterns and paradigms of God’s reign. The disciples are challenged by Jesus’ counter-cultural affirmation of the child.”<sup>45</sup>

### **Author / Audience**

Our main New Testament Scripture for discussion is Matthew 18:1-6. Who wrote the book of Matthew? Carson and Moo, in their *Introduction to the New Testament* says, “It is frequently asserted that this gospel commonly designated as Matthew’s, if like the other three canonical gospels, is anonymous. Yet, we have no evidence that these gospels ever circulated without an appropriate designation (*kata Matthaion*, ‘according to Matthew’) or the like.”<sup>46</sup> Carson and Moo quote Martin Hengel who challenges the anonymous label. Martin Hengel argues, “That as soon as two or more gospels were publicly read in any one church – a phenomenon that certainly occurred, he thinks no later than A. D. 100 – it would have been necessary to distinguish between them by some such device as a title.”<sup>47</sup> According to various readings the original date is unclear; some

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<sup>45</sup> John T. Carroll. *Interpretation*, in *Journal of Bible and Theology* “Abstract” 2001, accessed March 26, 2016, [www.mt.sagepub.com](http://www.mt.sagepub.com).

<sup>46</sup> D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo. *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 140.

<sup>47</sup> Carson and Moo, *Introduction*, 141.

say late 2<sup>nd</sup> century, about 100 years after it was written. Others say the title was attached about A. D. 125.

The early church fathers understood without exception,” say Carson and Moo, “that the apostle Matthew wrote canonical Matthew and that it was first written in Semitic literary form and was the first gospel written. Since Jesus and his apostles lived and served among the Hebrews, it may well have been a natural conclusion that the first gospel to be written was produced in the Hebrew [Aramaic] dialect.”<sup>48</sup>

According to Lea and Black who present information from the external resource, church historian Eusebius, who presents the opinion of Papias that, “Matthew wrote the oracles in the Hebrew language or dialect, and every one interpreted them as he was able.”<sup>49</sup> The term “interpreted” seemed to be the point of questions. Black seems to think the word refers not to translation but to application and explanation of content. “Papias is suggesting that the readers of the original gospel applied and explained it to their audiences so that they could understand it and live according to its precepts.”<sup>50</sup> Carson and Moo try to set the record straight, “The mix of text forms suggests an author writing in Greek but knowledgeable in Semitic languages and therefore able to vary his form ... it does not read like translation Greek.”<sup>51</sup>

Carson and Moo say some other factors in the debate of authorship include: “only this gospel refers to Matthew the tax collector 12:3 (which could be seen as gentle self-deprecation) ... The man who Jesus calls from his role as tax collector is identified as Levi. It is suggested that ‘Matthew’ is the personal name and the ‘Levi’ refers to his

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<sup>48</sup> Carson and Moo, *An Introduction*, 145-146.

<sup>49</sup> Thomas D. Lea and David A. Black, *The New Testament, Its background and Message*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2003), 132.

<sup>50</sup> Lea and Black, *The New Testament*, 133.

<sup>51</sup> Carson and Moo, *An Introduction*, 143.



tribe.”<sup>52</sup> Other opponents to the authorship of Matthew raised the issue of Matthew’s use of Mark; yet there was reasonable agreement among scholars that Matthew used Mark to show a unified testimony of Christ. Ralph Earle, author and Minister in the church of the Nazarene, writes in his “Introduction to Matthew”

The early church fathers were unanimous in holding that Matthew, one of the 12 apostles, was its author. However, the results of modern critical studies—in particular those that stress Matthew’s alleged dependence on Mark for a substantial part of his Gospel—have caused some Biblical scholars to abandon Matthean authorship. Why, they ask, would Matthew, an eyewitness to the events of our Lord’s life, depend so heavily on Mark’s account? The best answer seems to be that he agreed with it and wanted to show that the apostolic testimony to Christ was not divided. Matthew, whose name means “gift of the Lord,” was a tax collector who left his work to follow Jesus (9:9–13). In Mark and Luke, he is called by his other name, Levi.<sup>53</sup>

For our study, we will accept that Matthew the apostle is the author and that he wrote to a largely Jewish audience. If we proceed with this position that the original hearers and readers were Jews, then this book would help explain the person Jesus. Concurring with this thought Warren Carter, Professor of New Testament, St Paul School of Theology, writes in the *New Interpreter’s Study Bible* (NRSV) this note, “Many scholars see the Gospel as addressing followers of Jesus who were involved in inter-Jewish debates after the traumatic defeat of Jerusalem in 70 CE. The temple’s destruction removed a crucial center; raised questions about God’s faithfulness, will, presence, and forgiveness and forced debate about how to live faithfully.”<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Carson and Moo, *The Introduction*, 147.

<sup>53</sup> Ralph Earle, “Introduction to Matthew,” *New International Study Bible* (Zondervan Publishers, 2011), 1439.

<sup>54</sup> Warren Carter, “The Gospel According to Matthew” *New Interpreter’s Study Bible, New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha*, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2003), 1745.

In Matthew, we see considerable hostility between the Jewish leaders and the Pharisees. The heated climate between the two groups is important to our study as we follow the continual inquiries into the authority of Jesus and questions about his Kingdom. Carter gives further information in his notes about inter-Jewish debates saying:

Followers of Jesus in Antioch, part of the local synagogue or ethnic group, proclaimed Jesus as God's agent who provides forgiveness (1:21; 9:1-8), manifests God's presence and reliably instructs about God's will and interprets the Scriptures (5:17-48; 10, 13) but they did not carry the day. ... Matthew's Gospel assists this now separate community in defining their identity and shaping its faithful way of life within the diversity in late 1st century Judaism.<sup>55</sup>

This same proclamation, declaring Jesus as an agent of God with power, had gotten Jesus killed, yet his followers were teaching and reading a word that for the Jew would have been heresy.

Lea and Black see the book of Matthew as presenting, "Jesus as Messiah." Lea and Black express that, "The Jewish Messiah and the church, as God's new people, have temporarily replaced the covenant nation of Israel (21:41-44)."<sup>56</sup> If this type of interpretation of Matthew were presented to the original hearers it would have caused much debate and animosity.

This book is written in narrative form, with sermons and parables. In Matthew, we find Jesus teaching and challenging his disciples and accounts of His final week of earthly life. Matthew also presents Old Testament fulfillments throughout his Gospel that give credit to His Messiah statements. Our Matthew passage is noted by another Gospel writer, Luke. Luke's Gospel, also a narrative, according to commentary writer Joel

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<sup>55</sup> Carter, "The Gospel According to Matthew," 1745.

<sup>56</sup> Lea and Black, *The New Testament*, 135.

Green, “signals his understanding that the events he will narrate are related to God’s purpose, evident in the Old Testament and the history of God’s people as its culmination.”<sup>57</sup> Green’s information adds greater understanding to the discussion of who is Jesus?

Ralph Earle in the *NIV Study Bible*, “Introduction to Matthew” says, “The Jewish nature of Matthew’s Gospel suggest that it was written in Palestine, though some say it may have originated in Syrian Antioch.”<sup>58</sup> Earle goes on to say, “Matthew contains a repetitive emphasis on ‘Jesus’ fulfillment of the law and the Old Testament prophecy and traces ‘Jesus’ genealogy (1:1-17) back through David to Abraham, a fact that would attract the interest of Jewish people.”<sup>59</sup> Commentator Warren Carter adds this information regarding Matthew’s Gospel, “The Gospel asserts that it is God’s world, not Rome’s, and that God’s reign and presence are manifested in Jesus and not the emperor (1:23; 4:17); that God’s blessings extend to all people, not just the elite.”<sup>60</sup>

Lea and Black note that, “Matthew’s Gospel after the birth and early life of Jesus is in five sections: “The Sermon on the Mount, (Matt. 5-7), the commission to the disciples (Chapter 10), the parables (Chapter 13), humility and forgiveness (Chapter 18), and the Olivet Discourse (Chapter 24-25).”<sup>61</sup>

### **Matthew 18:1-6**

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<sup>57</sup> Joel B. Green. *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), prologue 39.

<sup>58</sup> Earle, “Introduction,” 1433.

<sup>59</sup> Earle, “Introduction,” 1434.

<sup>60</sup> Carter, “The Gospel According to Matthew,” 1746.

Matthew eighteen is the fourth discourse. This discourse follows chapters sixteen and seventeen where Jesus is giving lessons on humility and forgiveness. Jesus is saying astonishing things to the disciples in the prior chapters, three of them are witnesses to seeing Jesus. They saw a boy with demons exorcised then Jesus teaches them they can do the same. Also, chapter seventeen also reflects Jesus as somewhat impatient with the disciples' lack of faith. As we move to chapter eighteen, the disciples and Jesus have traveled to Capernaum (Matt. 17:24) and on the way, the disciples are caught up in a discussion of, "Who is the greatest?"

Commentator Warren Carter gives this Bible note on Matthew 18:1-5, "Greatness consisting of wealth, power and status was very important for the imperial elite Jewish culture ... and the disciples seem to not grasp Jesus' message of social reversal but are still possessed by conventional perspectives of honor and shame."<sup>62</sup>

From the book of Mark, his account of the occurrence says, "Jesus asked them, 'what were you discussing on the road, but they kept quiet'" (Mark 9:33-34, NIV). While Jesus already knows the answer, He asks questions of us to help us make our confession of pettiness. The disciples may have been ashamed of their discussion, knowing it was rooted in selfishness, and in a value system that was counter to that of Jesus' teachings. Finally, the disciples come clean with their discussion and tell Jesus directly what they were discussing.

Taking a closer look at the words of verse two in the book of Matthew, "Jesus called" and the Gospel of Luke says, "Jesus, knowing their thoughts, took" and Mark's

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<sup>62</sup> Carter, "Commentary on Matthew 18:1-5," *New Interpreters Study Bible*, 1778.

gospel says, “He took a child and set him in the midst.” Each account reports a connection to Jesus and children. Children are often in his presence, and he is not oblivious to their presence. Children are mentioned in Matt. 9:18, 19, 23-26; Mark 9:33-37; Luke 9:46-48; Matt. 14:21, 15:38; Mark 10:13-16. Jesus has a different value and attitude towards the children which irritates the disciples and Pharisees. In this teaching with his disciples, James Bailey in *Experiencing the Kingdom as a Little Child* says, “Jesus offers servanthood as the corrective to contentious debates about greatness. If you wish to be first you shall be last of all and servant of all.”<sup>63</sup> Then Jesus demonstrated his statement by using a child, which to the disciples would have represented powerlessness, and those excluded from adult male society and ones who were without economic resources. The study notes of commentator Warren Carter in the *New Interpreter’s Study Bible* say this about the disciples’ opinion of children: “The Gospel has shown them to be endangered (chapter 2) hungry (14:21), sick (8:6; 9:2), demon possessed (15:22; 17:18) and dead. Being a disciple means renouncing values of greatness and taking up the humble ways of dangerous children.”<sup>64</sup> Bailey quotes D. E. Nineham who suggest that, “Jesus’ comparison is not so much the innocence and humility of children; but rather the fact that children are unselfconscious, receptive and content to be dependent on others for care.”<sup>65</sup> Bailey also references Chad Myers as saying:

Jesus’ saying in Mark 10:13-16 and Mark 9:33-37 is not built on any idealistic notion of children’s characteristics, rather that children are marginalized and dominated like women and the poor. Children were the least in familial and

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<sup>63</sup> James L. Bailey, *Experiencing the Kingdom as a Little Child: A Rereading of Mark 10:13-16* (St. Paul, MN: Word & World Luther Seminary, 1995), 58.

<sup>64</sup> Carter, “Commentary on Matthew 18:1-5,” 1778.

<sup>65</sup> Bailey, 58. *Experiencing the Kingdom as a Little Child: A Rereading of Mark* refers in his footnote, to D. E. Nineham, *Saint Mark* (Baltimore, MD: Penguin, 1963), 268.

societal structures ... Jesus is thus inviting the disciples into a new reality of community and family, where the 'least' become the model for discipleship.<sup>66</sup>

Jesus is pointing out traits to the disciples not about age or smallness, but spiritual traits “like” those of persons in the Kingdom. The disciples asked and Jesus answered paraphrased, be childlike in trust, and faith. Jesus is challenging the disciples to forsake self-gain and personal goals; these things will be a hindrance. I think Jesus was giving the disciples the keys to the Kingdom.

Verse four, “Then He said to them, whoever humbles himself like this child is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.” Verse five, “Whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me” (NIV).

Not only are the disciples instructed to become like the child, but they are also told to one, welcome and two, receive with love, and three, do it in the Name of Jesus.

All of these actions and attitudes must be directed towards children! James Bailey says,

This demonstrative action finds its astonishing interpretation in Jesus' final saying which makes some sense of Jesus' paradoxical saying in 9:35 if interpreted metaphorically in 9:36-37, especially in 9:37 (a child figures Jesus, who in turn figures the one who sent him) ... according to this shocking new standard, embracing a child is like embracing God (Mark 9:37).<sup>67</sup>

The Jewish nation believed in substituting one thing for another. For example, lambs and turtle doves were sacrifices for sins during the Passover. J. Lyle Story, Associate Professor of Biblical Studies at Regents University says, “The term substantiation is used as a Jewish legal principle that a man's representative is as him.

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<sup>66</sup> Chad Myers, *Binding the Strong Man; A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus* (Maryknoller, NY: Orbis, 1988), 266.

<sup>67</sup> Bailey, *Experiencing*, 72.

Thus, receiving a child, equals receiving Jesus, equals receiving God.”<sup>68</sup> Truly the disciples were perplexed by the actions and statements of Jesus.

Mark’s Gospel also records this teaching. In Mark 10:14-15, our Scripture passage is important enough for another Gospel writer to report this conversation. Mark does not report any change in the conversation and again, the disciples’ comprehension of this lesson concept is lacking. Perhaps, like the disciples of the 1<sup>st</sup> century, the 21<sup>st</sup> century disciple is also challenged to see the reign and power of God’s Kingdom in children or in being “like” a child. Jesus says to enter the Kingdom, one must be “as a child.” The thought arises: is it too much to believe that God wants to restore fruitful living in us as a victorious body of Christ in the Earth? God’s children have a role in today’s Christian community and must not be despised, nor have their gifts neglected. Children’s humility in service brings glory to God.

Our passage in Matthew seems to unfold in four stages: (One) Jesus asking a question regarding an argument; (Two) Jesus’ answer; (Three) Jesus’ demonstration of his answer; (Kingdom value) and (Four) destruction and severe consequences. In verse six Jesus gives a harsh warning to those who will misuse and abuse the little ones. Verse six in our discussion reads, “but if anyone causes one of these little ones who believes in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea” (Matt. 18:6, NIV).

As noted earlier in John 14:12 Jesus addresses the theology of any believer and the work that they will do. Jesus states that, the faith of believers empowers them to pray

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<sup>68</sup> J. Lyle Story, “Mark” *Spirit Filled Life Bible* (NKJV) Jack Hayford, Ed., (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publisher, 1991), 1487.

in his name and whatever they ask will be done. Professor Siegfried Schatzmann from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary has this to say, “Because he was crucified, Jesus’ earthly ministry was limited to only a few years, but after the Resurrection and Pentecost, His ministry was and continues to be multiplied through Spirit-empowered believers.”<sup>69</sup> Any believer then and now includes children. Children must not be hindered or despised in their contribution to Kingdom work. The *Ellicott’s Commentary for English Readers* states this regarding the harsh consequences Jesus proclaims:

**That a millstone were hanged about his neck.** — The word for “millstone” indicates the larger stone-mill, in working which an ass was commonly employed, as distinguished from the smaller handmill of Luke 17:35. The punishment was not recognized in the Jewish law, but it was in occasional use among the Greeks (Diod. Sic. xvi. 35) and had been inflicted by Augustus (Sueton. Aug. lxvii.) in cases of special infamy. Jerome states (in a note on this passage) that it was practiced in Galilee, and it is not improbable that the Romans had inflicted it upon some of the ringleaders of the insurrection headed by Judas of Galilee. Our Lord’s words, on this assumption, would come home with a special vividness to the minds of those who heard them. The infamy of offending one of the “little ones” was as great as that of those whose crimes brought upon them this exceptional punishment. It was obviously a form of death less cruel in itself than many others, and its chief horror, both for Jews and heathen, was, probably, that it deprived the dead of all rites of burial. St. Mark and St. Luke, it may be noted, insert here the complaint of St. John, that he had seen one casting out devils in the name of Jesus, and this must be taken into account as an element in the sequence of thought. He was unconsciously placing himself among those who were hindering the work of Christ, and so “offending” those who believed in him.<sup>70</sup>

*Matthew Poole Commentary* adds to our understanding of the passage with the following:

**But whoso shall offend one of these little ones.** As offending signifies the laying of a stumbling block before any, so it signifies any motion or temptation to them to sin against God, whether it be by flattering or frowning arguments, though the latter seems rather to be understood here; so, by offending, it signifies the doing them any harm upon Christ’s account, because they own him, and make a profession of his gospel, which, besides that it is a stumbling block upon which they fall and suffer as to their bodies and outward concerns, is also a stumbling

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<sup>69</sup> Siegfried Schatzmann. “John” *Spirit Filled Life Bible*. Study notes, 1602.

<sup>70</sup> *Ellicott’s Commentary for English Readers*, Matthew 18:6, accessed March 29, 2016, [www.biblehub.com](http://www.biblehub.com).



block to their souls, such dangers being strong temptations to Christians, to turn them aside from the right paths of truth and holiness.<sup>71</sup>

Jesus places severe consequences on leading another astray and deadly consequences for leading a child astray. The teaching of Jesus welcomes the seemingly powerless and converts to the ways of the new Kingdom where Christ is head. The Message Bible expresses this verse in today's vernacular:

“If you give them a hard time, bullying or taking advantage of their simple trust, you'll soon wish you hadn't. You'd be better off dropped in the middle of the lake with a millstone around your neck. Doom to the world for giving these God believing children a hard time! Hard times are inevitable, but you don't have to make it worse-and its doomsday to you if you do.” Matthew 18:6, (MSG).

### Conclusion

The investigation through Scripture led us through the Hebrew Scripture of Psalm 8:1-3, where David shaped the song, and even the gurgling chorus coming from the mouth of babes as an instrument of power, that expresses the reign of God. David assisted us in visualizing how God has developed a weapon in the most unlikely of places. Children who appear helpless, undeveloped and dependent, in them is a warrior. God has used the simple for the truest worship and to accomplish great things. The psalmist continues in his song to be amazed at the wonder of God to see humans as his crowning glory (Psalm 8:4-6) and ties this Psalm to the imagery of the creation story of Genesis. Why mention this? In Genesis, humankind is given dominion charge over all things in the earth. I believe the psalmist is confirming that God's will is still in effect. The infants and babes are the seed created in God's image/likeness still filled with the

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<sup>71</sup> *Matthew Poole Commentary*, Matthew 18:6, accessed March 29, 2016, [www.biblehub.com](http://www.biblehub.com).

ability to have dominion. The very sound of praise from the children, infants and babes is so powerful that God declares it is like a fortress. David seems to have had a glimpse of understanding that this extraordinary dominion is from birth, even with the sound of a nursing infant. Praise is an extraordinary gift from an infinite God of splendor to a very small finite creature.

There are other supportive references to our main exegesis Scriptures that support the ministry of children to the church. The book of Joel speaks about God pouring out his Spirit. “And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions.” ... Joel 2:28. The statement “all flesh,” for this writer refers to all, without exclusion; old, young, middle, all socio-economic groups, males, females – literally all. Sons and daughters will prophesy; again Joel does not make a distinction in age, or class. And once again, God’s sovereignty ordains/endows according to His will.

In the discussion in the Gospels of who is the greatest, Jesus uses the child’s social position and the childlike qualities of humility and trust as qualities for the entrance into the kingdom of heaven. Jesus cultivated the spiritual qualities of the children by declaring them like the kingdom, declaring their faith and trust as a way to see heaven. Jesus validated children as spiritual beings. This is another look at the power of children in the body, and our Scriptures have set the foundation for the ministry of children to the body of Christ as well as strength to themselves.

As noted in the introduction, children in today’s society are often considered unusable, useless and exploited. Children are numbered high on the list of those in need

of consumables. They are most in need of care, nurture and training. The Word calls the Christian community to vigorously instruct children. In Psalm 78, I believe God gives commands to guide the next generation through the teaching of the words of God's wisdom. The psalmist gives a clarion call to teach the story of God, his works, his deeds and his saving grace. Why teach the story? The psalmist says, "so that the next generation might know them and the children yet unborn, and rise up and tell them to their children, so that they should set their hopes on God" Psalm 78: 6-7a (NRSV). This story is of the saving testimony of teachers and parents. I believe teaching the Word will produce faith-filled children, capable of working in the Kingdom.

Three points can be gathered from our discussion so far: (One) God placed strength in the praise through children, enough to quiet enemies of God; (Two) The qualities of helpless humility and trust in God are noted by God as necessary to enter the Kingdom and (Three) God commands The Word be told from generation to generation, for generations of generations. If God expresses himself in these points towards children, how important it is for the church body to follow the example. If the church fails to train and nurture the spirit-man within, and does not endeavor to develop this strength in children, we, too, could be reprimanded as a stumbling block for the little ones. The church may have left us, the body of Christ, open to the ravaging wolf by neglecting the great supernatural power Christ has bestowed in the mouths of little ones. There is an urgency of now!

This project will seek to know if cultivating children spiritually happens when they are exposed to teachings about the supernatural power of God called the Holy Spirit and teach them to hear from Him. To help children know about who they are and their

strength as believers I believe will strengthen their early growth in faith. Teaching children about hearing God and then providing ways for them to put action to their new knowledge, is possible. Teaching children about healing power through prayer, and their ability to use their mouth to confess, could be a possible measurable reality. If, faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God, then through the intentional teaching of a specific word, on hearing God, would a child, who has knowledge and faith from Scripture, when faced with life situations (i.e. family, drugs, divorce, death of sibling or family member, illness, bullying) rely on their supernatural indwelling of the Holy Spirit? Would a child's faith be demonstrated to and extended to others as well? This biblical study supports my thoughts that children, beginning as early as age five, are able to hear God and pray for their peers because it is the will of God. This study will develop a model for modern-day children's ministry that would promote ministry of children to other children.

## CHAPTER THREE

### HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

This study addresses the historical entity, children and pertinent historical data regarding their experiences and challenges throughout periods of church history. Children have always existed, as we all come from infancy, through childhood, young adult to adulthood. Since each of us has the same starting point, children are a constant on the scene of history. Adults would not exist if we did not have children. This study will seek to investigate the active presence and involvement of children in the development and spread of the church.

The term “children” could suggest many different connotations and meanings for each reader. The root word is “child” with the plural being “children.” It is important to establish a working definition for the word “children.” Citing from Merriam – Webster Dictionary the origin of the word child is, “Middle English, from Old English *cilc*; akin to Gothic *kilthei* womb, and perhaps to Sanskrit *jathara*-belly.” It was first used before the 12<sup>th</sup> century. It means,

*1*: An unborn or recently born person *1b. dial*: a female infant

*2a*: a young person especially between infancy and youth

*2b*: a childlike or childish person

*2c*: a person not yet of age

*3*: usually child play\' *chī* (-ə) *ld*\archaic: a youth of noble birth

*4a*: a son or daughter of human parents

*4b*: “descendant”<sup>1</sup>

The term “child” refers to “persons between the ages of four to eleven”<sup>2</sup> according to today’s Center for Disease Control (CDC). For our discussion, information presented will highlight persons between the ages of four and thirteen. Some information on older children that is pertinent to our study will be noted. This study hopes to give evidence, using historical information from c. 200 through the 1800’s, regarding some of the supernatural happenings revealed through children during periods of church history that affected the course of the church.

One noted paradigm stood out during my readings on the subject; that often historically male and female children are viewed as dirty, sick, dependent, helpless and naïve. If this paradigm has merit how does it play out historically in the development of church history? What are some other questions of interest to this study? Has the church seen children as spiritual beings? If they were involved in advancing the church were there time periods more accepting of their involvement than others? How have children been received and how long did it continue? Have children in church history been able to influence adult worshipers? These are questions pertinent to this study of children hearing God and praying for each other. This section will seek to find information about

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<sup>1</sup> *Merriam–Webster Dictionary*, “Child,” accessed May 29, 2016, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/child>.

<sup>2</sup> Center for Disease Control Parent information, “Child Age,” accessed May 29, 2016, [www.cdc.gov/parents/children/](http://www.cdc.gov/parents/children/).

religious movements where children were involved and see if it will shed light on our questions.

People of the world advance from generation to generation. In my opinion each generation builds, destroys and brings new thoughts, insightful ideas, doctrinal interpretations and inventions to the secular world and the church world. In this study of the past there may be evidence of things one might deem worthy or unworthy, if it is possible to qualify what is worthy or unworthy. Information regarding the past is important to help evaluate the present and lead to the future. Author Gordon L. Heath, assistant professor of Christian History at McMaster Divinity College, quotes in his book *Doing Church History*, an article, “Sketching the Future”, from John Stackhouse Jr. saying: “Historians function as the memory of the church, ... Historians help us to see what we have done, help us to learn from our mistakes and equip us with a range of options that have already been tried in the past.”<sup>3</sup> Like a historian, this study will seek out some insight into children’s history that’s interwoven into church history, what has been done, some of the mistakes and what equips us to move ahead.

### **Religious Movements/Revivals**

Children were called “loved,” “beloved” and “pure.” All such endearing positive terms have been connected throughout each century to the attitude towards children. This attitude was held in tension by negating terms like; “useless,” “a bother,” “ignorant,” “of

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<sup>3</sup> John Stackhouse. *Envision* (Fall 2000) 12. ‘Sketching the Future’, quoted in Gordon L. Heath. *Doing Church History, a User-friendly Introduction to Researching the History of Christianity* (Toronto, Ontario: Canada, Clements Publishing, 2008), 15.

little worth,” “keep them silent,” “always a tension.” Is there historical evidence of this tension of attitudes that plays out on the stage of church history?

Christian religious movements occur all around the globe. One of the earliest accounts of children speaking forth, or manifesting God’s power that connects to church history, is quoted by John Wesley in his “Letter to the Reverend Dr. Conyers Middleton. John Wesley quotes the early church father, Cyprian [c. 200-258] as saying, “Besides the visions of the night, even in the daytime, innocent children among us are filled with the Holy Spirit; and in ecstasies see, hear, and speak those things by which God is pleased to admonish and instruct us.”<sup>4</sup> Cyprian was an African Bishop of Carthage, an eminent figure in North Africa, and this kind of report about children from this source is profound in our study of children manifesting God’s Holy Spirit in early church history.

### **Central Europe**

In Central Europe in the early 1700s there was a reported unusual event; children broke out in revival. Below I quote a short history of these children who helped set the fires of revival in Central Europe about 1707. Bruce Hindmarsh, teacher and President of the American Society of Church History in his article “Let the Children Come to Me,” gives a stirring report of children’s involvement in Early European Christian movement. The year is 1708; the place Sprottau, Poland, he says:

The revival in central Europe began when school-age children of Protestant parents were not willing, like their elders, to be silenced and marginalized by their Catholic rulers. The children at Sprottau (near Glogau) began to meet in the open fields outside the town at daybreak and two or three more times a day. They would form a circle and pray—sometimes lying prostrate—and then sing

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<sup>4</sup> John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., vol.10, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996), 22-23.



Lutheran hymns, read Psalms and devotional texts, and close with a blessing. One Protestant father was so worried about the children doing this in defiance of the authorities that he tried to lock his son and daughter in their bedrooms. When he heard that they were going to climb out the window, he relented and let them go. Soon the adults were gathering and forming a circle around the children. As the children sang and prayed, the adults wept. In several towns, as many as 300 children gathered. Later, one observer reported a thousand. The magistrates issued orders to desist, but the children wouldn't stop. At Frideberg, the hangman was sent with a whip to disperse the children who were meeting in the marketplace, but when he saw them at their prayers, he couldn't do it. At Breslau, some of the Roman Catholic children joined the Lutheran children, despite strict orders from the magistrates for parents to keep their children at home.

This young people's revival was "baptized into the church," and Protestant pastors channeled it into a regional renewal movement. The nerve center of the revival was the Jesus Church in Teschen, a town deep in the south of Poland. (On a modern map of central Europe, you can find a town on the Polish-Czech border that is named Cieszyn on the Polish side, and Český Těšín on the Czech side.). The Jesus Church was one of a handful of churches that the ruling Catholic dynasty allowed the Protestants in the region to have, and they had to raise the money for it themselves. A series of Pietist pastors came in from Germany and elsewhere to oversee the church, but soon the services attracted thousands more than could be accommodated. Some people would walk all night to get there.

Though the church held 5,000 and had multiple balconies, services had to begin at six on Sunday morning and continue all day in different languages .... Teschen was to central Europe in the 18th century as to what Edwards' North Hampton was to America.<sup>5</sup>

Children were the crucial catalyst to begin this revival movement that helped spread the gospel to all nations. Hindmarsh expresses in his summary: that what the children started in Sprottau was like a fire moving across the ocean to what was then the New World. Hindmarsh calls it an "uprising of the children;" and he writes:

The story does not end there. Some Protestants in the neighboring region of Moravia were inspired by the revival at Teschen. They grew weary of religious and economic persecution and fled to east Saxony in German territory. There they found safe harbor on the estate of the pious nobleman Count Nicolaus von Zinzendorf, who established a village for them on his

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<sup>5</sup> Bruce Hindmarsh, "Let the Children Come to Me," *Christianity Today/Christian History & Biography*, 2009, accessed May 15, 2016, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/history/2009/may/let-little-children-come-to-me.html>.

property. They christened it Herrnhut, "the Lord's Watch," since they were determined to watch for the Lord even as they understood themselves to be under his watch and care.<sup>6</sup>

In 1722, Nicolaus Von Zinzendorf, Count, was asked by a small band of fugitives from Moravia, a refugee colony from Bohemia, if they might settle on his land. Dan Graves, Church historian reports in his article "Moravians at Herrnhut" about Zinzendorf:

Zinzendorf was a man of deep religious conviction and piety. At [six] he had written love letters to Christ. Deeply influenced by Franck and Spener's Pietism, the Count was only kept from becoming a minister by the raw exertion of family and state authority. Nonetheless, he and his wife had dedicated their lives completely to Christ. Eventually he would be chosen bishop of the Moravians.... Zinzendorf was appalled at the divisions between churches and hungered to unite the different factions in a spiritual peace. He was the first to speak of "ecumenism." At Herrnhut he learned what the Holy Spirit could accomplish in breaking down denominational walls.<sup>7</sup>

Herrnhut becomes a place to welcome all denominations and Christian groups.

Graves's article says, "Herrnhut had become a gathering place for many religious exiles. They spoke different languages and had different customs. Creeds varied; Lutherans, Schwenkfelders', Separatists, Reformed and Brethren lived side by side. Soon squabbles developed and Zinzendorf found himself moving from home to home, speaking with families of their spiritual need."<sup>8</sup>

Count Zinzendorf began to teach the Bible to his new arrivals. The Count's property during this time was overrun with many religious refugees, and the Count found himself not only speaking to family spiritual needs but entangled in the midst of religious

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<sup>6</sup> Hindmarsh, "Let the Children Come to Me," 3.

<sup>7</sup> Dan Graves. "Moravians at Herrnhut" *Christianity Today.com*, accessed May 30, 2016, <http://www.christianity.com/church/church-history/timeline/1701-1800/moravians-at-herrnhut-11630204.html>.

<sup>8</sup> Graves, "Moravians at Herrnhut", 1.

quarrels. Another writer gives this account regarding the Count teaching the children.

John Greenfield, an American Moravian evangelist, in his book *“Power From on High or the Two Hundredth Anniversary of the Great Moravian Revival 1727-1927”* reports:

In the early part of 1727 Count Zinzendorf began to give spiritual instruction to a class of nine girls between the ages of ten and thirteen years. He saw no traces of spiritual life among them. So, he began to pray for them. What a spectacle! A gifted, wealthy, young German nobleman on his knees, agonizing in prayer for the conversion of some little school girls!<sup>9</sup>

Hindmarsh’s statement adds to what was happening in Herrnhut. He says, “A fresh revival broke out among these refugees in 1727 (beginning again with the children) and Zinzendorf molded this movement into the Renewed Moravian Brethren.”<sup>10</sup>

Greenfield adds the finishing touches to this story of the children at Herrnhut. He says:

The Moravian outpouring occurred on August 13<sup>th</sup> of that year. But there was also an outpouring among the children. The children of both sexes felt a most powerful impulse to prayer. A meeting of the children took place in the evening of the 26<sup>th</sup> of August, and on the 29<sup>th</sup>, from the hours of ten o’clock at night until one the following morning, the girls from Herrnhut and Berthelsdorf spent these hours in praying, singing and weeping. The boys were at the same time engaged in earnest prayer in another place. The Spirit of prayer and supplication at that time poured out upon the children was so powerful that it is impossible to give an adequate description of it in words. Another eye-witness says: “I cannot ascribe the case of the great awakening of the children at Herrnhut to anything but the wonderful outpouring of the Spirit of God upon the communicant congregation assembled on that occasion. The breezes of the Spirit pervaded at that time equally both young and old.”<sup>11</sup>

Hindmarsh makes a connection in his account of the story and believes that through this outpouring of the children you can connect the dots to future events in church history.

At a meeting of some of these same Moravian Brethren in Aldersgate Street, London, in 1738, the future founder of Methodism John Wesley felt

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<sup>9</sup> John Greenfield, *Power From on High or The Two Hundredth Anniversary of the Great Moravian Revival 1727-1927*, (Atlantic City, NJ: The World Wide Revival Prayer Movement, 1931), 27.

<sup>10</sup> Hindmarsh, “Let the Children Come to Me,” 3.

<sup>11</sup> Greenfield, *Power From on High*, 29.

his heart "strangely warmed."... So, we can connect the dots. *One*: the children are uprising in Lower Silesia in 1708. *Two*: the revival at Teschen that followed. *Three*: The Renewed Moravian Brethren at Herrnhut in 1727. *Four*: John Wesley's Aldersgate experience in 1738. *Five*: John Wesley reads the *Faithful Narrative* of the revival under Jonathan Edwards in Massachusetts and realizes this is all one great work of God on both sides of the Atlantic.<sup>12</sup>

This story and others continue throughout Europe. The war had devastated what is now Western Poland and left many of the children as orphans. Their prayer revivals were supernatural. In the book *Kinderbeten: The Origin, Unfolding, and Interpretations of the Silesian Children's Prayer Revival*, Eric Swensson, Lutheran theologian, adds other details to the accounts that he reports from witnesses. Swensson says, "The Swedish negotiator, von Strahlenheim, witnessed the revival, and another Silesian noble mentioned while a youngster was addressing some of the adults, 'the youngster there was apparently acting as an evangelist and was reported to have said that if they wanted to change from their sins, God would be merciful to them and would absolve them.'"<sup>13</sup>

Swensson goes on to report other supernatural occurrences:

Many adults were led to tears. This is a fairly common element in accounts of other revivals, yet we see here that it was not the result of fiery preaching but being in the presence of the quiet worship of children. ... However, a miraculous element is given in the last extract: the letters of the prayer books began to irradiate light and doves were flying around the children close enough to touch. (This obviously irked some of the Silesian Orthodox Lutheran clergy).<sup>14</sup>

This same report and account of revival was published on different continents. In his book Swensson continues:

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<sup>12</sup> Hindmarsh, "Let the Children Come to Me," 3.

<sup>13</sup> Eric Swensson J. *Kinderbeten: The Origin, Unfolding, and Interpretations of the Silesian Children's Prayer Revival*. (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2010), 35. accessed May 30, 2016, <https://books.google.com/books>.

<sup>14</sup> Swensson, *Kinderbeten*, 36.

We have seen the accounts of the revival in Silesia were published on the continent, England, and the colony at Massachusetts through early experiments of journalism, as well as in books. The children's movement was viewed in providential terms and in an entirely positive way in the English translations. It is to be observed that negative comments came from the clergy of Lutheran Orthodoxy, while the Pietist and Evangelicals were positive. The above report was published first in Massachusetts in 1709 a few decades before the Great Awakening in the colonies but was republished in 1741. This could be due to interest in making sense of what they had experience by looking at similar events in the past.<sup>15</sup>

### In Scotland

There were some astonishing events reported in Scotland from the 18<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. In a letter to the preacher Whitefield, who visited Scotland in the 1740s, words came to him about how his preaching had affected the children at the Trader's Hospital and the Merchant's Hospital. Harry Sprange, Baptist pastor, working in child evangelism for 20 years, records in his book *Children in Revival* about a reported change in children's behavior after hearing and receiving the word. Sprange says:

As to the trader's Hospital, the change there is as remarkable. There is particularly there, one girl that was so vicious, that they were thinking of putting her out of the House, who is now become remarkable for piety: there are about sixteen of them who have a Fellowship meeting every week; And there are two young ladies of about twelve or thirteen years of age, the daughters of a pious lady in this place who have joined them. They all at these meetings take turn; and the one may hear the dear young things telling what the Lord has done for their soul and speaking of the Love of Christ manifested to them. Their mistresses say, they were never so obedient and dutiful as now, which I think a good proof of a real work of God on their souls.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Swensson, *Kinderbeten*, 40.

<sup>16</sup> Harry Sprange, *Children in Revival, Astonishing Times in Scotland from the 18<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*. (Scotland, Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 2002), 22.

Sprange records other information about the effects of Whitefield's ministry.

Sprange reports a minister from Edinburgh also wrote to Whitefield saying, "to be assured of the lasting effect of his work, and to say that 'praise is perfected out of the mouths of babes and sucklings.'"<sup>17</sup> Many of the pastors, teachers, mistresses and headmasters called what was happening among the children an "awakening." Children were holding weekly prayer meetings and were very concerned about the souls of others and giving godly instruction to one another. What was happening in one area seemed to spread widely throughout Scotland.

In Kilsyth to the North, there were numerous children's prayer meetings. In one parish where Pastor James Robe served, Sprange records him saying,

He estimated that the numbers of children and teens touched by God and relates the conversion of a six-year-old: There have been not a few under twenty years of age awakened, and several of them savingly wrought upon. 'out of the mouth of babes and little children God hath ordained to himself praise, to still the enemy and the avenger.' One of six years of age was awakened; she was in great distress and cried out much when she was first awakened. When she was brought to me after sermon, I was greatly surprised with such an instance. I enquired at her wherefore she cried, and what ailed her; She answered, 'Sin.' I asked her now she came to feel that sin ailed her: she answered, 'From the preaching.'<sup>18</sup>

One final quote from Sprange about Scotland comes from a Methodist minister, Thomas L. Parker, who was astonished with the revival among the children. He believed it to be a great work from God and he says, "In reference to the children, all we need to say is, that their simplicity, faith, and love, when they have found the Savior, makes them such instruments for good as God can use, and there again is the scripture fulfilled 'out of the

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<sup>17</sup> Sprange, *Children in Revival*, 25.

<sup>18</sup> Sprange, *Children in Revival*, 35.

mouth of babes and sucklings, God has perfected praise.”<sup>19</sup> Thus here are several accounts of adults witnessing the power of the Holy Spirit moving in and through children, who saw this as a fulfillment of Psalms 8:1-2, cited in the Biblical Foundations Chapter of this project.

### **In France**

Protestant persecution was widespread, but the Protestant church continued to grow congregations. In France on August 24, 1574, some 22,000 Protestants were slaughtered in what is known as the St. Bartholomew’s Massacre.

Charles Schmitt, Senior Pastor of Immanuel’s Church, and published author whose passion is the present outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the earth; and for the promised worldwide revival and harvest of souls that will pave the way for the triumphant return of our Lord Jesus, speaks about this massacre in his book, *Floods Upon the Dry Ground: Giving Foundation and Understanding to the Progressive Move of the Holy Spirit in the Earth*. He says,

In France, despite severe persecution, the Protestants had over 2,000 congregations by 1560. But on the fateful night of August 24, 1574, under the direction of the Catholic Queen Mother, Catherine de Medici, some 22,000 Protestants were slaughtered in the St. Bartholomew’s massacre. Huguenot blood ran red in the streets of France for the sake of the restoration of the simplicity of the gospel—forgiveness of sins by faith in Christ *alone*, the *sole* authority of the Holy Scriptures, and the priesthood of *all* believers. Huguenots, concentrated in the Cevennes Mountains of southern France, experienced a powerful move of the Holy Spirit in their midst during this period. They testified, “God has nowhere in the Scriptures concluded Himself from dispensing again the extraordinary gifts of His Spirit unto men.” An unusual work of the Spirit was seen in the Spirit of

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<sup>19</sup> Sprange, *Children in Revival*, 257.

prophecy that rested on young children. Children as young as three years old prophesied the word of the Lord with fluency and clarity.<sup>20</sup>

Children in this event seem to be able to hear from God and to impact all who were in the mountains. The children were perhaps, poor, uneducated, dirty, or dependent, acted in direct conflict to their image. They were bold, outspoken and rich in fulfilling historical Scripture.

### **In England**

Across the English Channel was England and there it was noted that children were interested in reading the Bible now printed in English. They were so interested they were willing to take a beating for such reading. Diane Severance, History professor at Rice University, tells this story in her article “England’s Greatest Treasure”:

In 1541, an English Bible was placed in a parish church in the town of Chelmsford in Essex, England. A young man by the name of William Malden was fifteen, and he loved to listen to the Scriptural readings, but his father took it away. William determined he would learn to read so he could read the Scriptures himself ... William and his father’s apprentice pooled their money and together secretly bought an English New Testament. They hid it in their bedstraw and read it whenever they could. When William’s father discovered this, William received a good beating! Why? The Bible in English was still something new, and it took time for it to be accepted.<sup>21</sup>

The above mentioned could seem like an unimportant account, but it is similar to Count Zinzendorf who at six-years old was influenced by God and, loving Christ, wrote him letters. Years later, this same Zinzendorf becomes instrumental in helping the

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<sup>20</sup> Charles P. Schmitt, *Floods Upon the Dry Ground: Giving Foundation and Understanding to the Progressive Move of the Holy Spirit in the Earth*, (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image Publishers, 1998), 102.

<sup>21</sup> Diane Severance, “England’s Greatest Treasure”, Christianity.com, accessed May 30, 2016, [www.christianity.com/church/church/timeline/1501-1600/](http://www.christianity.com/church/church/timeline/1501-1600/).



Moravians. This powerful prayer meeting like others involving children had long far-reaching results.

Greenfield, records in his book, saying: “The prayer meeting that began on August 13<sup>th</sup> at a communion service, went on for 100 years, and from that one small village community more than 100 missionaries went out in 25 years.”<sup>22</sup> Some of those Moravians would years later influence other early Christians like John and Charles Wesley from England. The account of the English Bible being desired by children to read in their spare time early in their lives could also be related to their later contributions to church history. Historical reports give us information that can be interpreted as involving divine use of children to advance the church.

### **In the Americas**

The Puritans were English Christians who did not agree with the practices of the Church of England. The Puritan settlers arrived in 1630 and established the Massachusetts Bay Colony. The Puritans and Pilgrims arrived with great zeal to make this new land a godly nation. They were soon faced with many who saw this new land as a place to gain land and wealth. The Age of Enlightenment and its philosophy was also being transported by newcomers and influenced the colonies. Diane Severance reports in her article, “The Great Awakening:”

When Theodore Frelinghuysen, a minister of the Dutch Reformed Church, came to begin his pastoral work in New Jersey during the 1720s, he was shocked by the deadness of the churches in America. He preached the need for conversion, a profound, life-changing commitment to Christ, not simply perfunctory participation in religious duties. Presbyterian Gilbert Tennent was heavily influenced by Frelinghuysen and brought revival to his

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<sup>22</sup> Greenfield, *Power From on High*, 29.

denomination. Tennent believed, “the deadness of the churches was in part due to so many pastors never having been converted themselves.” His book *On the Dangers of an Unconverted Ministry* caused quite a stir!<sup>23</sup>

Great revivals often occurred in the setting of great communions where persons were converted and showed evidence by running and shouting, showing great joy. “These revivals gave content to the title of a Great Awakening,”<sup>24</sup> says Paul Conkin Professor of History at Vanderbilt University, in his book *Cane Ridge: America’s Pentecost*, he adds this information:

The label “Great Awakening” is confusing. It suggests one vast, related, colony-wide revival of religion. The actual phenomenon was much more complex. Almost from the time of colonization, certain ministers among New England Puritans and later, among middle colony Dutch Reformed or Presbyterian congregations reported exciting interludes when sermons were well attended, when individuals came under deep convictions, and when numerous persons gave convincing testimony to conversion and thus were admitted to the communion table. Most such periods of awakening remained quite local, keyed often to the effectiveness of a single minister. The timing varied from place to place, and the linkages were few. But such revivals were usually contagious enough to spread to at least a few nearby congregations. This happened in New Jersey in the 1720s, in Connecticut Valley after Jonathan Edward’s success in 1734 at Northampton, and, primarily because of the role of George Whitefield, at several points in New England and the middle colonies from 1739-1742.<sup>25</sup>

### **Jonathan Edwards**

Events similar to those in Europe seem to reoccur, this time on the North American shores of North Hampton, Massachusetts, under Pastor Jonathan Edwards

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<sup>23</sup> Diane Severance, “The Great Awakening” accessed May 30, 2016, <http://www.christianity.com/church/church-history/timeline/1701-1800/the-great-awakening-11630212.html>.

<sup>24</sup> Paul K. Conkin, *Cane Ridge: America’s Pentecost* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), 31.

<sup>25</sup> Conkin, *Cane Ridge*, 30.

during the year of 1734 -1735. North Hampton was a small town of about 200 families who were said to have been “awakened.” This is the term used by this writer to describe the account of a powerful moving of God’s Spirit on or in the spirit of a person. This term would be later used to describe the revival movement in America that Conkin above also says fueled the first Great Awakening. Jonathan Edwards presents in his message, “A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God”:

God has in many respects gone out of, and much beyond, His usual and ordinary way. The work in this town, and others about us, has been extraordinary on account of the universality of it, affecting all sorts, sober and vicious, high and low, rich and poor, wise and unwise. It reached the most considerable families and persons, to all appearance, as much as others. In former stirrings of this nature, the bulk of the young people have been greatly affected; but old men and little children have been so now. Many of the last have, of their own accord, formed themselves into religious societies in different parts of the town. A loose careless person could scarcely be found in the whole neighborhood; and if there was any one that seemed to remain senseless or unconcerned, it would be spoken of as a strange thing.”<sup>26</sup>

In an article about Jonathan Edwards, by William C. Nichols from the book *Seeking God: Jonathan Edwards’ Evangelism Contrasted with Modern Methodologies*, Nichols reports:

Edwards was shocked that so many young people were seemingly wrought upon: ‘It has heretofore been looked on as a strange thing, when any have seemed to be savingly wrought upon and remarkable changed in their childhood.’ How young were these children? ‘I suppose, near thirty were to appearance, savingly wrought upon between ten and fourteen years of age; two between nine and ten, and one of about four years of age.’<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God.” accessed May 29, 2016, [www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/text/ipb-e/epl-10/web/edwards-narrative.htm](http://www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/text/ipb-e/epl-10/web/edwards-narrative.htm).

<sup>27</sup> William C. Nichols, “A Study of Revival & Conversion Using Jonathan Edwards’ A Faithful Narrative of the surprising Work of God.” Taken from the book, *Seeking God: Jonathan Edwards’ Evangelism Contrasted with Modern Methodologies*. International Outreach. Inc. (Ames, Iowa), accessed May 29, 2016, <http://www.jonathan-edwards.org/RevivalandConversion.html>.

The report of the four-year-old seemed most astounding to everyone at that time. Even Edwards, who had accepted God as a child, was cautious and reported his observations of this conversion carefully. Jamie L. Brummitt, candidate in American Religion at Duke University, gives us Edward's narrative with substantial information about four-year-old, Phebe Bartlet:

Edwards relayed Phebe's conversion narrative in *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God*. Phebe's parents had not talked to her about religion because they thought she was too young and not capable of understanding. Nonetheless, Phebe's eleven-year-old brother "seriously talked to her about the things of religion" and she was "greatly affected." Five or six times a day Phebe secretly prayed in a closet. One day while observing Phebe in the closet, Mrs. Bartlet heard Phebe say, 'Pray, blessed Lord, give me salvation! I pray, beg, pardon all my sins!' When Phebe came out of the closet, she sat by her mother and cried. Mrs. Bartlet tried to comfort her, but Phebe began 'wreathing her body to and fro, like one in anguish of Spirit.' When asked, what was wrong, Phebe shouted, "I am afraid I shall go to hell!" She began crying, but suddenly stopped, smiled at her mother, and exclaimed, 'Mother, the kingdom of heaven is come to me!' Phebe explained to her mother how three passages from her catechism had come to her mind and enlightened her thoughts. Phebe returned to her closet, prayed, and on exiting declared, 'I can find God now!' Phebe told her mother that she loved God "better than anything," even her father, mother, and sisters. She was not even afraid of going to hell now. Phebe's mother asked her if she thought God had given her salvation. Phebe replied, 'Yes ... Today.' For the rest of the afternoon, Phebe appeared "exceeding [sic] cheerful and joyful." That evening she witnessed to a male cousin that 'heaven was better than earth.' The next day Phebe resumed crying and her spirits were low. She explained to her mother and a neighbor that 'she cried because she was afraid they [her sisters] would go to hell.' Phebe urged her sisters to turn their hearts to Jesus that afternoon.<sup>28</sup>

Brummitt believes there was a certain amount of rejection of Edwards's narrative due to the telling of these two testimonies: the one woman and the child. Brummitt says, "Although Phebe's conversion narrative embodied Edwards' theology of childhood, A

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<sup>28</sup> Jamie L. Brummitt, "Jonathan Edwards, A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God (1737)" *American Protestantism*, (2015) Duke University, accessed May 29, 2016, <http://jamiebrummitt.com/jonathan-edwards-a-faithful-narrative-of-the-surprising-work-of-god-1737>.

*Faithful Narrative* was not widely published in America until the Second Great Awakening. The unpopularity of *A Faithful Narrative* was likely related, not to its grim view of the destiny of unconverted children, but to its inclusion of Abigail Hutchinson and Phebe Bartlet's conversion narratives."<sup>29</sup> We have discovered the stirring of Revival in North Hampton, with Johnathan Edwards where children are a part of the testimony, further information says there is more.

### John Wesley

Edwards contemporary in England, John Wesley, great father of Methodism, also has several accounts of children in his *Journal* dating 1759. In his *Journal* for July 14, 1759, John Wesley writes of an incident with a young girl:

When sermon was ended, one brought good tidings to Mr. B. from Grandchester, that God had there broken down seventeen persons, last week, by the singing of hymns only; and that a child, seven years old, sees many visions, and astonishes the neighbours with her innocent, awful manner of declaring them." And then on July 22, 'the little child before-mentioned continues to astonish all the neighbourhood.' A noted Physician came some time ago, and closely examined her. The result was, he confessed it was no distemper of mind, but the hand of God.<sup>30</sup>

On July 16, 1759, Wesley writes of another incident with a young girl.

Mr. B. this evening preached in his house, where I observed Molly Raymond leaning all the while as if asleep; but an hour or two after she desired to speak with him. I wondered she was not gone home and was concerned that so little a girl should have so far to go in the dark without company. Mr. B. told me, neither she nor the other justified children were afraid of anything.<sup>31</sup>

On August 6, 1759, Wesley writes of an incident with a fifteen year- old girl:

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<sup>29</sup> Brummitt, "Jonathan Edwards, A Faithful Narrative," 1.

<sup>30</sup> John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, 3rd ed., vol. 2, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996), 499 – 500.

<sup>31</sup> Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, 500.

About five in the afternoon I heard them singing hymns. Soon after, Mr. B. came up, and told me, Alice Miller (fifteen years old) was fallen into a trance. I went down immediately, and found her sitting on a stool, and leaning against the wall, with her eyes open and fixed upward. I made a motion as if going to strike; but they continued immovable. Her face showed an unspeakable mixture of reverence and love, while silent tears stole down her cheeks. Her lips were a little open, and sometimes moved, but not enough to cause any sound. I do not know whether I ever saw a human face look so beautiful: Sometimes it was covered with a smile, as from joy mixing with love and reverence; but the tears fell still, though not so fast. Her pulse was quite regular. In about half an hour I observed her countenance change into the form of fear, pity, and distress; then she burst into a flood of tears, and cried out, 'Dear Lord; they will be damned! They will all be damned!' but in about five minutes her smiles returned, and only love and joy appeared in her face. About half an hour after six I observed distress take place again; and soon after she wept bitterly, and cried out, 'Dear Lord, they will go to hell! The world will go to hell!' Soon after, she said 'Cry aloud! Spare not!' And in a few moments her look was composed again, and spoke a mixture of reverence, joy and love. Then she said aloud, 'Give God the glory.' About seven her senses returned. I asked, 'Where have you been?'— 'I have been with my Savior.' 'In heaven, or on earth?'— 'I cannot tell; but I was in glory.' 'Why then did you cry?'— 'Not for myself, but for the world; for I saw they were on the brink of hell' 'Whom did you desire to give the glory to God?'— 'Ministers that cry aloud to the world: Else they will be proud; and then God will leave them, and they will lose their own souls.'<sup>32</sup>

In the 1750's we have evidence from this creditable source, John Wesley, that children were ministering in the mid-eighteenth century English revival movement.

### **American Revival/ Great Awakening/ Cane Ridge**

In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century the American revival movement, brought about the Great Awakening to the new nation. In states such as Kentucky and Ohio, there is further witness of children exhorters. From the article "Out of the Mouth of Babes: Exhortation

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<sup>32</sup> Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, 509.

by Children and the Great Revival in Kentucky,” Ted Smith, Associate Professor of Preaching and Ethics at Emory University says,

The Revival beliefs and practices combined with existing patterns of childhood to open up possibilities for authorized exhortation by children. Children seized those possibilities to play a large role in the revival-and an even larger role in the stories told about the revivals ... Boys and girls as young as five offered public exhortations in the revivals that rolled across Kentucky in the first years of the nineteenth century.<sup>33</sup>

An account given by Richard McNemar, reported to be a Presbyterian turned Shaker, in the same article reports that he told stories about children exhorters in various camp meetings. Ted Smith’s article says,

McNemar told this story of a boy at the meeting at Indian Creek, Ohio, in June of 1801. The boy, ‘from appearance about twelve years old,’ was powerfully affected by the sermon of an adult preacher. He slipped away from the preaching stand, overwhelmed by conviction of sin, and eventually found the strength to climb up on a log some distance away. Then, tears streaming down his face, he began to exhort. ‘He cried aloud to the wicked,’ McNemar wrote, ‘warning them of their danger, denouncing their certain doom, if they persisted in their sins; expressing his love to their souls and desire that they would turn to the Lord and be saved.’ A crowd gathered around the boy. Two men held him up, and he spoke for about an hour. Finally, exhausted from his labors and running to the edge of language, the boy wiped his brow with a handkerchief. He raised the handkerchief high above his head and then dropped it, saying, ‘Thus, O sinner! Shall you drop into hell, unless you forsake your sins and turn to the Lord,’ Members of the crowd fell ‘like those shot in battle,’ McNemar wrote. Falling from conviction of their sin, they rose to conversion and to exhortations of their own. The wonder of conversion ‘spread in a manner which human language cannot describe.’<sup>34</sup>

By the early 1800s there was a decline in conversion and revivals were sporadic and often short-lived. There was concern in the west that there was a darkness invading the land. In an article by Mark Galli, author and editor of *Christianity Today*, “Cane

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<sup>33</sup> Ted A. Smith, “Out of the Mouths of Babes: Exhortation by Children and the Great Revival in Kentucky.” *Practical Matters Journal* (October 1, 2009), accessed May 9, 2016, <http://wp.me/p6QAmj-nZ>.

<sup>34</sup> Ted A. Smith, 2. Smith refers, in his footnotes, to Richard McNemar, *The Kentucky Revival or, a Short History of the Late Extraordinary Outpouring of the Spirit of God in the Western States of America* (New York, NY: Edward O. Jenkins, 1846), 26.

Ridge: What Exactly Happened at the Most Important Camp Meeting in American History?” Galli says:

The minutes of the frontier Transylvania Presbytery reveal deep concern about the “prevalence of vice and infidelity, the great declension of true vital religion in too many places. Rampant alcoholism and avaricious land-grabbing were matched by the increasing popularity of both universalism (the doctrine that all will be saved) and deism (the belief that God is uninvolved in the world).<sup>35</sup>

Pastors and churches were most concerned about the rebellious, sinful state of the people.

Galli’s article goes on to say, “Church discipline was thrown into high gear. Church minute books record those excluded from fellowship for alcoholism, profanity, mistreatment of slaves and sexual immorality. Some congregations were so exacting they decimated their ranks. No matter, they said, “sinning had to be stopped in order that God might again bless.”<sup>36</sup>

History reports that revivals broke out in Cumberland, Ohio, and Cane Ridge, with wonders involving children, that ignited the church anew. Children not only sang and danced but were being used (by the Spirit of God) as exhorters of the Word.

The great communion at Cane Ridge, located in Central Kentucky, happened in 1801. This communion is called the greatest of all communions turned revival and/or camp meeting. Conkin reports some factors that may have led to this phenomenal historical event. Conkin says,

The population of Kentucky had surged and the surge had outpaced the formation of organized congregations. Secondly, the population of Kentucky still retained at least a modicum of Christian belief. However busy or distracted. Third, above all, many yearned for the heightened religious experience, for the warmth of communal support and the

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<sup>35</sup> Mark Galli, “Cane Ridge: What Exactly Happened at the Most Important Camp Meeting in American History?” *Christian History*, Issue 45. (1995) accessed May 9, 2016, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/history/issues/issue-45/revival-at-cane-ridge.html>.

<sup>36</sup> Galli, “Cane Ridge,” 2.



exhilaration of communion services that they remembered from their youth or from earlier waves of revival. Finally, parents suffered all the generational anxieties that had fueled the revivals of 1787-90. They sorrowed for their young people, most of whom seemed indifferent to religion.<sup>37</sup>

Conkin says, “Religious stirrings began in central Kentucky during the winter of 1800-1801. Reports of such fervor came from all areas and from all evangelical ministers.”<sup>38</sup> There were several communions prior to Cane Ridge: the Baptists, the Evangelicals and Presbyterians had served the people with a successful communion service. Persons had fallen, bucked, had bursts of joy and exercised at each event. Conkin reports, “The Cane Ridge communion had extensive build-up by Barton Stone as he traveled ‘As Stone traveled he did a great job in advance publicity. He established close working relations with the Methodists, involving them in planning.’”<sup>39</sup> It is important to note that Barton Stone was one of the founders of the Disciples of Christ denomination and witnessed first-hand the success of Spirit-filled communion meetings with children ministering to others. Cane Ridge became a campground for what is estimated to range up and beyond 20,000 but not less than 10,000 attendees. Conkin records the following about Cane Ridge:

Descriptions of what happened on Saturday spread with every horseback rider who left the grounds. By Sunday it seems that everyone in accessible range wanted to see what was going on. One suspects that practically everyone with an opportunity managed to get to Cane Ridge, from the governor of the state on down to farm laborers and slaves. It was a circus; the most exciting event in years...the wildest exercises remained outside the meetinghouse. While inside ministers not given to wild emotionalism, wept at the communion tables. Outside the groaning and falling continued ... ministers preached day and night; the camp illuminated with candles, on

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<sup>37</sup> Conkin, “Cane Ridge,” 64-65.

<sup>38</sup> Conkin, “Cane Ridge,” 67.

<sup>39</sup> Conkin, “Cane Ridge,” 73.

trees, at wagons, and at the tent; Prayers and Hymns continued. Observers confessed their inability to describe the scene.<sup>40</sup>

In his article Mark Galli, again details what he also calls one the most talked about revival events in American History, the Cane Ridge Revival. He describes some of the events that would excite and convict the congregation into shouting, running, tears, and falling out prostrate. The momentum for revival seemed to be lit again at Cane Ridge. Cane Ridge was a do-not-miss event scheduled only for the weekend, but often on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday others were still arriving. Children exhorters often were leading the message.

Galli reports on an incident with a child mounted on a man's shoulders, he says:

One seven-year-old girl mounted a man's shoulders and spoke wondrous words until she was completely fatigued. When she lay her head on his as if to sleep, someone in the audience suggested 'the poor thing' had better be laid down to rest. The girl roused and said, "Don't call me poor, for Christ is my brother, God my father, and I have a kingdom to inherit, and therefore do not call me poor, for I am rich in the blood of the Lamb!"<sup>41</sup>

Conkin, writer about Cane Ridge, referenced a *Letter From a Gentleman to His Sister in Philadelphia* that also reported this same event and notes this comment, "The theological images are confused, the words quite compatible with those of a child who had learned religious language from her parents, but nonetheless, such words from the mouth of a babe seemed almost unbelievable to those who crowded around."<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Conkin, "Cane Ridge" 92-93.

<sup>41</sup> Galli, "Cane Ridge," 2, accessed May 9, 2016, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/history/issues/issue-45/revival-at-cane-ridge.html>.

<sup>42</sup> Conkin, 95. Conkin refers, in his footnotes, to "Letter From a Gentleman to His Sister in Philadelphia" August 10, 1801, in *Gospel News*, 45.

Ted Smith's article quotes a short story told by James McGready, a Presbyterian preacher hailed as "The Father of The Great Revival," as spreading this narrative, a story of a child exhorter. McGready says:

A twelve-year-old girl: she ran to her father, and clasping her arms around his neck, she wept over him, and told him that he had no religion-she told him what she saw in Christ and what she felt of his love. 'O my Father! Says she, Christ is willing to have you-O try to seek him, and you will find him-O! If you but saw that in Christ which I see-O! If you but saw his fullness and willingness, you would come to him.' This seemed to pierce the old man like a dart and made him weep like a child.<sup>43</sup>

Numerous accounts by credible revivalists, preachers and evangelists recall, and retell astounding stories about children and their strong providential input. The media often reported these events under the genre "*strange but true*."<sup>44</sup>

### The Tension

Child exhorters, for some, helped to give validity to revivals. The revival structure had allowed authority to be ascribed to the speech of children. Ted Smith reports:

In their renunciation of the authority of the Synod of Kentucky, Barton Stone, Richard McNemar, and other revival leaders mocked 'elaborate treatises' on true religion. 'A child of a few years old understands the meaning of believing,' they wrote, 'as well as a doctor of divinity.' Because saving faith was so simple, a child could exhort as well as any adult.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Smith, 2. Smith refers, in his footnotes, to James McGready, "A Short Narrative," 101, accessed May 9, 2016, <http://practicalmattersjournal.org/2009/10/01/out-of-the-mouth-of-babes/>.

<sup>44</sup> Writer's Italics.

<sup>45</sup> Smith, 5. Here Smith refers, in his footnotes, to the authors Robert Marshall, John Dunlavy, Richard McNemar, Barton Stone, John Thompson, "An Apology for Renouncing the Jurisdiction of the Synod of Kentucky: to Which is Added, A Compendious View of the Gospel and a Few Remarks on the Confession of Faith" (Lexington, KY. Reprinted Carlisle, PA: George Kline, 1805), 5.

At first the child exhorters were a marvel but soon the children's presence and actions opened up debates and struggles among clergy, laity and parents. There were those who opposed this seemingly over-the-top activity of young children. There were always questions and comments about the child exhorters and their role in the revival. The child exhorters were known to avoid standing behind the normal church pulpit, but would create a place such as a table or tree stump that had been previously used by a legitimate preacher. The child exhorters often sounded like adults and would preach on salvation and other theological beliefs that would amaze both lay persons and clergy.

Smith writes:

McGready made this clear when he described the 'scene of wonder' of 'dear young creatures, little boys' and girls' expounding upon the plan of salvation and speaking in the language of scripture. "I felt mortified and mean before them," he concluded. "They spoke upon the subjects beyond what I could have done."<sup>46</sup>

Soon there were opponents and open rebuttal for and against child exhortation. Continuing with Smith's article, "Out of the Mouth of Babes," Smith reports a critic's response to George Baxter of Washington Academy as arguing; "these wondrous exercises 'are not as involuntary as they appear.' Their cause is natural, not supernatural, and they can be explained by 'sympathy.'"<sup>47</sup> Smith then gives an example of strong disputants. He quotes Barnard Wishy as saying:

The real controversy was between scoffers who sought a naturalistic explanation and boosters who offered a supernatural one. Proponents of revival believed its effects to be involuntary for the persons affected because the phenomena were special works of the Spirit of God. Scoffers and moderates countered each point of this platform precisely, arguing that

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<sup>46</sup> Smith, 7. Smith refers, in his footnotes, to author James McGready, *The Posthumous Works of the Reverend James McGready*, ed, (Nashville, TN: J. Smith's Steam Press, 1837), 50.

<sup>47</sup> Smith, 9. Smith refers, in his footnotes, to Anonymous, "Remarks on Baxter's Letter," *The Western Missionary Magazine* December 1803, 458-60, accessed May 9, 2016, <http://practicalmattersjournal.org/2009/10/01/out-of-the-mouth-of-babes/>.

the effects were voluntary and natural. Opponents didn't attempt exorcism, but took bread soaked with vinegar to rub in the eyes and noses of fallen to see just how committed they were to the charade of trance. Both sides agreed on a basic framework: the effects were supernatural, involuntary, and legitimate, or they were natural, voluntary and fraudulent.<sup>48</sup>

In several quotes, Ted Smith offers comments that attempt to support the questions and validity of child exhorters. Smith quotes Barton Stone, "In falling, weeping, appealing to emotions, repeating short phrases and speaking publicly, children did not invent some new practice. They simply took up a highly esteemed practice that came to be expected of them and exercised it in spaces newly opened to them."<sup>49</sup>

Smith again quotes Barton Stone, famous for the great Cane Ridge Revival. Stone told a few stories of child exhorters in his mid-century memoir, Smith says, "Stone wrote of 'two little girls, and two other girls, sisters, who fell and then rose to exhort' in language almost superhuman. But Stone took pains to add, though, that 'from that time they became pious members of the church and were in constant attendance.'<sup>50</sup> Stone appears to link their new behavior to their exhortation in a new language? Stone observes children's behavior and may think it is from God. Stone is somewhat ambiguous.

Smith also quotes Margaret Bendroth as saying:

Child exhorters adapted recognized forms to talk like little adults. That adult-like behavior played an essential part in their authority. Exhortation by children amazed people not because they believed children had such purity they would not

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<sup>48</sup> Smith, 9. Smith refers, in his footnotes, to author Barnard Wishy W. *The Child and the Republic: The Dawn of Modern American Child Nurture* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1970), 85.

<sup>49</sup> Smith, "Out of the Mouth of Babes" 7.

<sup>50</sup> Smith, "Out of the Mouth of Babes" 7.

feign inspiration, but because they believed children had such incapacity they *could not feign* inspiration.<sup>51</sup>

By the 1840s the staunch revivalist, Barton Stone, sought to downplay the wonder of child exhorters and to stress the long endurance of their piety. As a founder of the Disciples of Christ denomination, Stone both witnessed and promoted supernatural manifestations of the Spirit. He witnessed the ministry of children operating under the power of the Spirit. Yet, his final thoughts were uncertain and unsure of where to place child exhorters. This left the ministry of children to the church held in this tension: to speak or not to speak.

It is interesting that the controversy ended or at least subsided with a consensus somewhat against child exhorters and their ability to speak the things of God. Child exhortations were short-lived and the status for children seemed to return to a “seen and not heard” mode. From my readings, child exhortations were deemed by some as a naturalistic phenomenon not supernatural nor under the Spirit of God. One final significant quote from the same article by Ted Smith, where he quotes Robert Davidson, a Presbyterian sophisticate, and scientific chronicler, in a chapter entitled “Extravagances and Disorders of the Revival.” Davidson rejected both the supernatural and voluntary accounts of the revival wonders. Smith says, “Davidson portrays the child exhorters as sincere, but still placed their exhortations in a long list of disorders and found what he felt were answers from the emerging mental science of his day.”<sup>52</sup> Davidson says,

That we might seek an explanation of the phenomena exhibited in Kentucky at the commencement of the present century in the influence of the Imagination upon

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<sup>51</sup> Smith, 7. Smith refers, in his footnotes, to author Margaret Bendroth, “Children of Adam, Children of God: Christian Nurture in Early Nineteenth-Century America,” *Theology Today* 56. 4 (January, 2000), 495-505.

<sup>52</sup> Smith, “Out of the Mouth of Babes,” 11.

the Nervous System, originally stimulated by earnest hortatory preaching, venting itself in vehement ebullitions of Animal Excitement, and easily propagated by the natural operation of the laws of Sympathy; in all which there was nothing peculiar or unprecedented, except the greatness of the masses affected, and the novelty or oddity of some of the motions introduced. ... He could acknowledge that the children's exercises were involuntary without granting any kind of supernatural agency behind them.<sup>53</sup>

Smith concludes:

Whatever good the child did, Davidson wrote, 'came from their contribution to the expansion of morality and religion. His summary of the revival reflected his ambivalence: 'that it was attended by beneficial consequences, especially during the earlier stages of progress, is undeniable. Whether that good was of sufficient weight to counterbalance the varied evils introduced, is a question not so easily settled.' Child exhorters were swept up into this evaluation, they became some among many, not wrongs but not quite right.<sup>54</sup>

It is almost as though men and women of the church could speak of the great good wonders of God, but to witness and declare that God had worked through children; great and worthy church history events that possibly helped propel the church forward, was seemingly too much. Their consensus began a shift from the ministry of children to ministering to children in church gatherings.

To follow this shift in thinking, planned details and regulations came into play at camp meetings Ted Smith mentions a few:

The organizers of camp meetings, communions and revivals began to close up spaces for exhortation by children. ... Certain places were deemed for certain things and pulpits for ordained ministers ... Sometimes there was only a single pulpit limited to those asked to speak ... The Baptists and Presbyterians abandoned camp meetings to the Methodists ... The press was played down and offered explicit rebuke of child exhorters...McNemar who had spoken often of

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<sup>53</sup> Smith, 11. Davidson's language supports Ann Taves's argument that a new vocabulary of mental science began to emerge after 1829 to explain religious experience. See Taves, *Fits, Trances and Visions: Experiencing Religion from Wesley to James* (Princeton University Press, 1999).

<sup>54</sup> Ted Smith, 11. Quotes Robert Davidson, "History of the Presbyterian Church and the State of Kentucky" (New York, NY. Robert Carter, 1847), 159. accessed May 9, 2016, <http://practicalmattersjournal.org>.

the supernatural accounts of children shifted his description from wondrous events to economic virtues.<sup>55</sup>

New methods and paradigm shifts instituted man's way of handling a gift from God.

### **Conclusion**

This brief chapter quoted credible sources, citing events where children made their supernatural mark on church history. Children moving in the power of the Spirit are on the scene of major prayer meetings, revivals and camp meetings, including the beginnings of our Disciples of Christ history. Children as a group were not always held in high esteem by adults and others in authority, yet historically we see children initiating the call to prayer in Central Europe which started an event that traveled three major continents for hundreds of years. Just this one event would certainly answer our question on the lasting effect of children on the church body.

This study has quoted evidence of children exhorting words of salvation and grace to adults who wept and received. In this study God cultivated the children as spiritual beings led by the Holy Spirit to speak in power what they heard. This study has shown that there was tension between those who could accept exhortation of the Word from the lips of children, and those who looked for some natural explanation. To some it brought such emotional appeal, full of awe and wonder, as they saw children moving and speaking under the power of God.

Jonathan Edwards was one of the credible sources who changed his outlook on child exhorters from exuberant to cautious; offering a cautious defense of the emotional

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<sup>55</sup> Smith, "Out of the Mouth of Babes," *Practical Matters Journal*, 10.



exhortations circulating through New England. Edwards is quoted by Ted Smith as saying in his somewhat defense of children exhorters, “He grounded his defense in a voluntarist view of human action in which the passions could shape the will. The ‘higher affections’ connected even to ‘the noblest part of the soul,’ and so speech that moved the affections could move the will to make a saving choice.”<sup>56</sup> Even he could not completely deny the moving or changing of the heart or minds of those that witnessed or even heard the testimony of the children.

Exhortation is speech and today would come under the category of free speech. Persons have been communicating moving sermons, poems, speeches and other oratory messages for hundreds of years. The act of cutting off the children from exhortation separated them in the 1800s. They could only observe God through their parents, clergy, deacons and other believers. This separation has had far-reaching effects, which are still realized in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. If there is validity in the introductory statement that each generation brings advances to the world then what have we done with the voice of the children? One could debate if, in the 1800s the voices of children were systematically silenced, one wonders if the church still has children on mute, causing the church to miss a strong, bold and powerful voice?

The development of the Disciples of Christ denomination was partially influenced because Barton Stone was moved by the ministry of child exhorters. He witnessed open-air preaching and supernatural manifestations of the Spirit of God. Stone was a witness to hundreds and thousands of what seemed to be supernatural conversions, many resulting

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<sup>56</sup> Smith, 4. Smith refers, in his footnotes, to “Jonathan Edwards, “A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God” in *the Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Vol. IV Ed. C. C. Goen (New Haven, CT, Yale University Press, 1972), 199.

from child exhorters. Writings on Stone often discuss his desire for a New Testament church that would echo and demonstrate the New Testament Word of God. I argued in the New Testament section of the Biblical Foundations chapter that Jesus taught that children could do the work of the kingdom so, children actually doing ministry should be a part of Barton Stone's New Testament church. Multigenerational worship today is somewhat limited in Stone's denomination. As with other denominations, children's ministry is an entity and looks to training and teaching, but often lacks the component of children actually doing ministry. The early paradigm shift and controversy seems to still hold some clout. Can the church understand and accept children declaring the Word under the power of the Holy Spirit? Can children minister with decency and in order if taught, trained and encouraged? We will seek some answers to these questions as our study continues.

This brief historical study has opened our eyes to see what has been done. Now we are faced with the urgency of today, do we dare move forward from what we consider our good, as well as our mistakes, to making new church history?

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS**

I begin this section with a restatement of our questions about children and their importance to God in the kingdom of God. If children matter, which has been a statement throughout this work, does theology give us an idea of what that looks like? Could it be that children utter a sound and have an authority in their voice ordained by God? Could children have an anointing that silences God's enemies? Has God chosen a worthy vessel that looks too weak and unassuming to be powerful? Is there power in a child's innocence of faith to work the miracles of the Kingdom of God?

As this paper explores the theology of these inquiries, it is important to note my personal beliefs. I believe that teaching children about the presence of God in them, by teaching them how to know the voice of God, and by accepting his voice they will gain spiritual strength and faith in him. Children who get excited about the awesomeness of God, I believe, will have a willingness to demonstrate the kingdom to others through prayer and witness.

Children watch and absorb from their environment both physical, and spiritual. I believe that the simple teachings whether secular or Christian present to our children contain some form of theology and doctrine. Children are being indoctrinated. This statement should awaken our churches to the significance of conversations children hear adult believers have with God, about God, and how they demonstrate their faith. Again,

children are watching and learning as they have from generation to generation. What, and how, children are taught as they mature has been proven to influence their world views, relationship perceptions, and personal character. It is essential for the church of the 21<sup>st</sup> century to examine what young minds are subject to or not subject to in their early forms of catechism, because this may be where the first hook of faith into believing the things of God are supernatural and happen.

Finally, theologically is there a need for the church to help shape an understanding of the supernatural Holy Spirit and His works to the community of children? I believe these are important inquiries, which warrant serious consideration and possible answers to support the church in continuing to shape the young believer.

In our Old Testament Scripture (Psalm 8:1-2, NIV) we recall the Psalmist as gazing into the sky and seeing the glory of God from the vast heavens and spiraling his gaze all the way downward to infants and babies. The Psalmist seems to say that the Almighty God in his sovereignty has ordained his glory in all. The psalmist makes the statement that not only does God receive glory, but He also designed spiritual warfare in the sound coming from the mouth of the infant or child. The verse reads, “O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens. From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise because of your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger” (NIV). If we begin with the theological thought that God is almighty and sovereign in power, one could summarize that God, the omnipotent, can use all things created to His glory, and for His glory.

For our discussion, the sovereignty of God is important. The sovereignty of God and the ways of God are sometimes counter-cultural to secular thought. It is necessary

also to establish a point of ecclesiology that is essential to our hypothesis. If our children are to learn to hear from God and speak to others in the church. It will be important to our study to explore the idea that in some way children's voices in praise and prayer are weapons in spiritual warfare. Children's voices manifest the Holy Spirit, so some exploration into the study of Pneumatology is vital. Is it a theologically sound idea to think that the Holy Spirit shows up in the life or actions of a child in such a manner as to silence an enemy, bring healing, or set the captive free? Pneumatology and ecclesiology can also give this work a broad look at how the Holy Spirit works in the community of faith. A final discussion for this study will seek to relate our theological insights to the faith community of children.

### **Sovereignty of God**

“Sovereign.” what does this term mean? “Sovereignty” Webster defines the term, “1. *absolute*: supreme excellence or an example of it: freedom from external control: autonomy: controlling influence”<sup>1</sup>

From Theopedia:

The **Sovereignty of God** is the biblical teaching that all things are under God's rule and control, and that nothing happens without His direction or permission. God works not just some things but all things according to the counsel of His own will (see Eph. 1:11). His purposes are all-inclusive and never thwarted (see Isa. 46:11); nothing takes Him by surprise. The sovereignty of God is not merely that God has the power and right to govern all things, but that He does so, always and without exception. In other words, God is not merely sovereign *de jure* (in principle), but sovereign *de facto* (in practice).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Merriam-Webster Encyclopedia, accessed November 4, 2016, [www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sovereignty](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sovereignty).

<sup>2</sup> “Sovereignty” accessed November 5, 2016, <http://www.theopedia.com/sovereignty-of-god>.

Quoting from Evangelical Theologian, A. W. Pink:

What do we mean by [the sovereignty of God]? We mean the supremacy of God, the kingship of God, the god-hood of God. To say that God is Sovereign is to declare that God is God. To say that God is Sovereign is to declare that He is the Most High, doing according to His will in the army of Heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth, so that none can stay His hand or say unto Him what doest Thou? (Dan. 4:35). To say that God is Sovereign is to declare that He is the Almighty, the Possessor of all power in Heaven and earth, so that none can defeat His counsels, thwart His purpose, or resist His will (Psa. 115:3). To say that God is Sovereign is to declare that He is "The Governor among the nations" (Psalm 22:28), setting up kingdoms, overthrowing empires, and determining the course of dynasties as pleaseth Him best. To say that God is Sovereign is to declare that He is the "Only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords" (1Tim. 6:15). Such is the God of the Bible.<sup>3</sup>

Mark Galli, editor-in-chief of *Christianity Today* writes regarding Karl Barth's view of the Sovereignty of God from his *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (1919). "He sounded themes that had been muted in liberal theology. Liberal theology had domesticated God into the patron saint of human institutions and values. Instead, Barth wrote of the 'crisis,' that is, God's judgment under which all the world stood; he pounded on the theme of God's absolute sovereignty. ..." <sup>4</sup>

Roger E. Olson, Evangelical theologian discussed God's sovereignty as follows:

Christians don't know what they mean when they talk about "God's sovereignty"—beyond "God is in control." My concern has been to help Christians think reflectively about God's sovereignty and arrive at beliefs about it that are biblically sound and intelligible. My own view of God's sovereignty is what I call "relational." I believe in God's "relational sovereignty." What I want to do here, today, is explain what I mean by that and invite you to consider it as an

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<sup>3</sup> A. W. Pink, *The Sovereignty of God*. Chapter 1, accessed November 5, 2016, <http://www.theopedia.com/sovereignty-of-god>.

<sup>4</sup> Mark Galli, "Karl Barth Courageous Theologian" *Christianity Today Church History*, the Galli Report (2000), accessed October 30, 2016, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/history/people/theologians/karl-barth.html>.

alternative to the view of God's sovereignty. The second view of God's sovereignty, the one I plan to expound here, is *relational theism*.<sup>5</sup>

Olson quotes Oord from *Relational Theology*:

Oord, one of the editors and authors of *Relational Theology*, defines it this way: "At its core, relational theology affirms two key ideas: 1. God affects creatures in various ways. Instead of being aloof and detached, God is active and involved in relationship with others. God relates to us, and that makes an essential difference. 2. Creatures affect God in various ways. While God's nature is unchanging, creatures influence the loving and living Creator of the universe. We relate to God, and creation makes a difference to God."<sup>6</sup>

Olson quotes author, Barry Callen a theologian, historian, professor, and administrator in the Church of God who comments on relational theism (or theology) "it focuses on 'the interactivity or mutuality of the God-human relationship.' God is understood to be truly personal, loving, and not manipulative. The interaction of the wills of Creator and creature are real."<sup>7</sup> Continuing with Olson's statement,

According to relational theism, the God-human relationship is reciprocal, mutual, interactive. God is not Aristotle's "Thought thinking Itself" or Aquinas' "Pure Actuality" without potentiality. Rather, God is Pinnock's "Most Moved Mover"—the superior power who allows creatures to resist him and becomes vulnerable and open to harm as well as joy.<sup>8</sup>

Scripture and comment comes from Chip Ingram, a Christian pastor and author who shares his comments on God's Sovereignty:

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<sup>5</sup> Roger E. Olson, "A Relational View of God's Sovereignty" Missio Alliance Gathering, April 2013, accessed October 30, 2016, <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/rogereolson/2013/04/a-non-calvinist-relational-view-of-gods-sovereignty>.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas J. Oord, Brint Montgomery, Karal Winslow, *Relational Theology: A Contemporary Introduction* (San Diego: CA, Point Loma Press, 2012), 2. Quoted in Olson "A Relational View of God's Sovereignty," 2.

<sup>7</sup> Barry Callen, quoted by Olson "A Relational View of God's Sovereignty," 7.

<sup>8</sup> Roger E. Olson. "A Relational View of God's Sovereignty" Missio Alliance Gathering, April 2013, accessed October 30, 2016, <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/rogereolson/2013/04/a-non-calvinist-relational-view-of-gods-sovereignty>.

God is in control of all things and rules over all things. He has power and authority over nature, earthly kings, history, angels, and demons. Even Satan himself has to ask God's permission before he can act (Psalm 103:19) That's what being sovereign means. It means being the ultimate source of all power, authority, and everything that exists. Only God can make those claims; therefore, it's God's sovereignty that makes Him superior to all other gods and makes Him, and Him alone, worthy of worship.<sup>9</sup>

Whether you lean to the thoughts of Barth which are similar to Calvin or to relational theology of a caring interactive involved God, this chapter highlights that God chose to include all of his creation in the ability to give glory in his kingdom, and all his creation includes children.

In the *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, William A. VanGemenen wrote this, describing sovereignty and the ordained praise in verse two: "All creation reveals the power and glory of God's name. Only God's people know how to respond to this revelation of his majesty in nature, because he revealed his name in Exodus."<sup>10</sup> God chose to reveal through the Psalmist that in the mouths of children there is a bulwark of strength. Here is a thought: could this be a weapon of spiritual warfare? VanGemenen adds more to the discussion:

The glorious rule over heaven is no surprise from a theistic perspective: But the marvel of the biblical view of the creator is that his creation on earth not only reveals but is glorious. The discordant note sounded by the enemies V. 2; in his creation is silenced by the praise of children. Regardless of how the wicked assert themselves, they cannot outdo the evidence of God's glory on earth and in heaven. It is all around us, his glory is established (NIV, "ordained") and no enemy can overcome his kingdom. The translation "you have ordained praise" may also be rendered "you have established a bulwark" (strength, "NIV). The sound of children is concrete evidence of God's fortress on earth. The continuity of the human race is God's way of assuring the ultimate glorification of an earth

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<sup>9</sup> Chip Ingram, "What Does the Phrase 'God Is Sovereign' Really Mean?" *Christian Theology*, Walk through the Bible. 2004, accessed November 5, 2016, <http://www.christianity.com/theology/what-does-the-phrase-god-is-sovereign-really-mean-11555729.html>.

<sup>10</sup> Willem A. VanGemenen in "Psalms" *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebeline (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991), 110.



populated with a humanity. The sound of opposition is silenced by the babbling and chatter of children! What a King! <sup>11</sup>

One could rise with a shout reading the above powerful statements about children created by God. They are to be weapons in the plan of God to defeat his enemies. They are heirs of the great salvation in Christ and are to be participants of the praise and victory of the Sovereign God. One supernatural example of the sovereignty of God is told in Numbers 22:20-29 in the story of the ass speaking to Balaam. If God can use a donkey to speak, He certainly can speak through a child. Ministry of children is a part of the church. God approved!

### **Practical Theology and Children**

Being raised in a traditional black Baptist Church and as a young adult serving in the African Methodist Episcopal Church and currently as a Disciple of Christ, I viewed the theology of ministry to children based on teaching and training children through the traditional modes of videos, games, storytelling, bible verse memorization, and children accepting Christ. Over the years, I was aware that children minister to other children and adults but I was not intentional in teaching children to minister to one another. Although there were children ministering, little emphasis has been put on receiving ministry from children. In my last eighteen years as a children's pastor I have used curriculum and strategies designed to teach children about God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Curriculums tell the story of God speaking to various Bible persons, yet again seldom reflecting on the ministry of the children. When asked how the children had ministered to me, I had to

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<sup>11</sup> VanGemeren, "*Psalms*" 111.

hesitate and restructure my thinking to answer such a question. In answer, I must state how the Sovereign God had used children to speak into my life at periods of hopelessness; in times of stress little hugs, smiles, singing and laughter have removed from my presence a heavy spirit and restored my joy. I was a witness to the use of the ministry of children! God used “children” many times to minister and equip me, “the church.”

This led me to search further for information about the ministry of children to the church. In a writing of Marcia J. Bunge, *A More Vibrant Theology of Children*, she points out:

Many churches consider reflection on the moral and spiritual formation of children as “beneath” the work of their theologians and as a fitting area of inquiry only for pastoral counselors and religious educators. Consequently, systematic theologians and Christian ethicists say little about children, and there is no well-developed teaching on the nature of children or why we should care about and for them. Although churches have highly developed teachings on related issues such as abortion, human sexuality, gender relations, and contraception, they do not offer sustained reflection on the nature of children or our obligations toward them. Children also do not play a role in the way that systematic theologians think about central theological themes, such as the nature of faith, language about God, and the task of the church. Certainly, issues regarding children are addressed occasionally in theological reflection on the family. However, for the most part, church teaching simply admonishes the parents to educate their children in the faith and for children to obey their parents.

Lurking behind our lack of commitment to children in the church and the wider culture are several simplistic views of children and our obligations to them. In a consumer culture, the “market mentality” molds our attitudes toward children as not having inherent worth, but as being commodities, consumers, or even economic burdens. Or, in another simplifying move, we view children as either all good or all bad; for instance, popular magazines or newspapers tend to depict infants and young children as pure and innocent beings whom we adore and teenagers as hidden and dark creatures whom we must fear.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Marcia J. Bunge, “A More Vibrant Theology of Children” Center of Christian Ethics. (Baylor University, 2003), 13. accessed November 12, 2016, <http://www.baylor.edu/ifl/christianreflection/ChildrenarticleBunge.pdf>.

Joyce Mercer expresses similar thoughts in her book *Welcoming Children: A Practical Theology of Childhood*, where she reflects on the church's welcome to children through brief children's sermons and teaching, so her book is a search for the theology of the church and children.

She writes, "This book is part of my search for a child-affirming Christian theology and for a church that genuinely welcomes children amid a culture and church tradition that at best embraces them ambivalently."<sup>13</sup>

Mercer discusses her thoughts based on what is known as Practical Theology. Here's how she defines this theology:

Practical theology, as both a discipline within theology and as a method for going about theological work, describes a theology intending to be both true and useful. Practical theology is concerned with truth, insofar as it seeks to offer a valid and adequate account of the praxis of Christian faith in particular context in which human beings strive to live lives in relation to God's reign...to give seriously imaginable accounts of human experience, practical theological descriptions of human situations, including those of children, must be recognizable in relation to actual encounters with people, communities, contexts and practices.<sup>14</sup>

In her thoughts, she refers to what is learned according to Practical Theology as that which is practiced in life. This resonated again the idea of this project that when children are seen as full members of the new creation in Christ and are given instruction in the power of God, it will affect their belief about hearing from God and what they practice in ministry to the church and the world. If children who are instructed in a belief in the supernatural God are given opportunity, they will practice the ways in which God

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<sup>13</sup> Joyce Ann Mercer. *Welcoming Children, A Practical Theology of Childhood* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2005), 3.

<sup>14</sup> Mercer, *Welcoming Children*, 13.

has spoken to them. It is important to keep our focus on the ministry of children to the church.

Recalling thoughts from our biblical foundations chapter the Old Testament shepherd, writer and King, David was quoted in Ps. 8: 2-3 as seeing and praising how the heavens declare the glory of God, and the gurgling of the infant is as a spiritual weapon of God. It is as if the Sovereign God impresses on David the connections of all things to him.

The modern church doesn't quite make this connection. Children are often seen as little darlings who need entertainment while adults worship. Christian stories in the form of entertainment is used as training through videos, games, toys and Bible reading. Teaching also comes in the form of children's choir, dance and plays, and each one of these is worthwhile and worthy with great participation. Disappointment comes when the children's components are used and perceived as fillers in the service; often applauded and thought cute. All of our teachings are wonderful, but they are used as ways to keep children busy, calm and entertained until parents return. Our challenge is, can the nature and function of children's ministry expand? Can the ministry of children look more like Psalm 8:1-2 and be seen as a praise inoculated with the power of God?

Another challenge is in shifting our paradigm about children that has the potential to affect the present Biblical teaching to children. Would teaching children how to interact with God, hear Him, talk to Him and develop a spiritual history with the Spirit of God, redirect or influence the teaching focus? Becky Fisher says, "Of all creatures of our God and King, children are the most naturally equipped and gifted to walk in the arena of

signs and wonders because of their simplicity and childlike faith. They merely need to be told that God can do anything.”<sup>15</sup>

Children often show an immediate liking to the things of faith and are willing to believe in the power of God to do the wonderful things of the Bible story. Crucial to teaching in Children’s Church is the element that God still does all these things, like he used Moses, Joshua, David, Peter, Paul, James and the list goes on; God can speak to and use you too! If these are the limits of children’s ministry, then the limits must be removed and replaced with a picture of what children in ministry will look like.

Teaching children things of the Spirit must be vitally important to the faith. Each generation will have its set of beliefs based on its teaching. Each generation must have the testimony of the works of God and of his current presence. I believe teaching children to know that God still speaks today will increase their faith in that supernatural realm of God that they cannot see. I believe intentional teaching about the Holy Spirit and the power of the Spirit working in them will develop children that can pray for one another. This is the ministry of children.

### **Ecclesiology**

Children who are a part of the church or the body of Christ are being trained as disciples who will continue the purpose of the church. Greg Herrick, teacher and writer, says in his article, “The Church”:

The term *ekklesia* in the NT can refer to the ‘church of God’ meeting in a home (Rom.16: 5), in a particular city (1Cor. 1:2; 1Thess 1:1), in a region (Acts 9:31) or a larger area such as Asia itself (1Cor. 16:19). When these data are taken together

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<sup>15</sup> Becky Fischer, *Redefining Children’s Ministry in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: A Call for Radical Change* (Mandan, ND: Kids in Ministry International, Inc., 2008), 205.

we realize that the church is a universal body composed of all true believers in Christ, united in Him by the Spirit, and that there are particular geographical expressions of it here and there and throughout history. Thus, though there are many local “churches,” there is really only one church (Eph. 4:4; Heb. 12:23). This leads naturally to the idea that the church is both visible and invisible. It is invisible in that God knows who is truly a Christian and who is not. It is visible in that there are local expressions of it to which Christians commit themselves. Further, it is not necessary to belong.<sup>16</sup>

Herrick goes on to describe his perception of the purpose of the church as, “The church is to have a God-ward focus in worship, praise and prayer. This involves freely worshipping the Trinitarian God and praying for each other as well as for those in the world.”<sup>17</sup> A *Compelling Truth Magazine* article, “What was God’s Purpose for Establishing the Church?” submits this view:

The church is the body of Christ—a group of people unified (Ephesians 4:1-3) under Christ, who represent and reflect Him to the world (1 Corinthians 12:12-17). The purpose of the church is to join people of different backgrounds and talents and provide them training and opportunities for God’s work. It accomplishes this both internally, within the body, and externally, in the world... Sound teaching leads to spiritual maturity which leads to building up the body of Christ.

The natural result of sound teaching and a unified body is that the members of the church will take care of each other. The most powerful way to care for others is to pray for them (Acts 2:42). Just as the early church prayed for each other (Acts 12:5; Philippians 1:3-4), so we should bring each other’s needs before God (Philippians 4:6-7).<sup>18</sup>

These above definitions and purposes of the church place this study firmly in line with ecclesiology. Children can represent and reflect Christ to the world. Children with

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<sup>16</sup> Greg Herrick, “Ecclesiology: “The Church” *An Introduction to Layman’s Beliefs, A Layman’s Guide*, accessed November. 25, 2016, <https://bible.org/seriespage/8-ecclesiology-church>.

<sup>17</sup> Herrick, “Ecclesiology: “The Church” *An Introduction to Layman’s Beliefs*, accessed November 25, 2016, <https://bible.org/series page/8-ecclesiology-church>.

<sup>18</sup> *Compelling Truth Magazine*, “What was God’s Purpose in Establishing the Church,” accessed November 25, 2016, [www.gotquestions.org](http://www.gotquestions.org), <https://compellingtruth.org/purpose-church.html>.

different background and talents can be provided with training and opportunities for God's work. Sound teaching can lead to spiritual maturity in children which has the potential of building the body of Christ. The members of the Children's Church can take care of each other. Children can pray for others. Why make such a statement? Because what is said about adults in the area of prayer and caring in the church, also applies to children in the church.

The children in the context/denomination and in this project are children deacons selected using similar criteria to the adult deacons of the church. The children have to have shown a commitment to attendance and serving in Children's ministry for at least a year. They have accepted Christ as personal Savior and have been baptized. Children are baptized in the Disciples of Christ at the age of six. The deacons receive recommendations from a Children's Ministry teacher, a peer and parent. The child is also required to write a short essay as to why they want to serve as a deacon. These young deacons are trained to help set-up the worship area, lead the morning service, collect the offering, usher, assist other children and the children's Pastor. The children's ministry follows the requirements of the Bible to train children while they are young. These are children that are drawn to the things of God and want more. To reiterate, the most powerful way to care for others is to pray for them. This project proposes to give the deacons, in addition to what they are receiving, sound teaching on hearing from God and praying for one another. What better way to fulfill one of the calls of God for the Church that is without age, size, or gender limitations.

### **Pneumatology**

Theologically is there a need for the church to help shape an understanding of the Supernatural Holy Spirit and His works to the community of children? I trust the ministry of children can be reshaped by going deeper into the works of the Holy Spirit and helping children to see the wonder and awe of God, just as they so often see in media about the world system. This project proposes that deeper learning will affect the ministry and transformation of the lives of children, thus, a discussion of the Holy Spirit: pneumatology.

In the Old Testament Scripture, David says, “Out of the mouth of babes and infants, God has ordained strength to silence his enemies.” One cannot see what comes out of your mouth as sound for it is in the invisible realm. Yet, it is out of the mouth into the invisible that God placed and ordained strength with power to silence his enemy.

The invisible reality is not spoken of in the church in terms that a child would understand, nor most adults. In the black church experience, persons shout, dance, clap their hands and run all around, rejoicing as expressions of the Holy Spirit within them. Children often laugh, or are frightened, by these displays. Much like the children of Israel at the base of the mountain were frightened by the power and fire of God on the mountain, although these could be expressions of the supernatural. In these scenarios children may be bombarded by the works of the Spirit, but without sound teaching an understanding will be lost.

In his book, *When Heaven Invades Earth*, Bill Johnson says, “The invisible realm is superior to the natural. The reality of that invisible world dominates the natural world we live in, both positively and negatively. Because the invisible is superior to the natural,



faith is anchored in the unseen.”<sup>19</sup> This is perhaps a controversial statement, but in this context, it is related to the need for those teaching children to stay mindful of the spiritual realm and the natural realm that we are all experiencing.

It is crucial to keep in mind that children are bombarded with the supernatural invisible realm daily. In their church, they may laugh at the parade of superheroes, magic potions, wizards and spells scroll across the “tell-a-vision,” endlessly entertaining and spiking their imagination and belief in the mystical. These are old evils that come disguised in glamour, lights and the spectacular supernatural. Yet, children’s teachings regarding their faith is generated on 3,000-year-old stories that are supernatural but are not often conveyed supernaturally. The Holy Spirit is the supernatural power of God operating throughout every record of the history of God and man. In *Quotes from the Early Church Fathers*, “to say God’s Spirit spoke is clearly teaching that His Spirit is the very essence of Himself. The Bible and Church Fathers taught the Holy Spirit is divine and the very essence of God.”<sup>20</sup> The Holy Spirit is the missing factor that sometimes children are not told about or shown, regarding His participation. Could the Holy Spirit be at work here in Psalms 8:1-2?

What does the theology of the Holy Spirit or pneumatology look like? How does theology explain the Holy Spirit? According to Greg Herrick, teacher and writer of *An Introduction to Christian Belief*, says:

The term pneumatology comes from two Greek words, namely, pneuma meaning “wind,” “breath,” or “spirit” (used of the Holy Spirit) and logos meaning “word,” “matter,” or “thing.” As it is used in Christian systematic theology,

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<sup>19</sup> Bill Johnson, *When Heaven Invades Earth: A Practical Guide to A Life of Miracles* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image Publisher, Inc., 2003), 45.

<sup>20</sup> *Quotes from the Early Church Fathers: The Holy Spirit- Apostles Creed*, accessed November 16, 2016, [Apostles-creed.org](http://Apostles-creed.org).

“pneumatology” refers to the study of the biblical doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Generally, this includes such topics as the personality of the Spirit, the deity of the Spirit, and the work of the Spirit throughout Scripture.<sup>21</sup>

Herrick goes on to say, “The Holy Spirit makes choices, teaches, guides, reveals Jesus, convicts, seals believers, can be grieved, possesses a rational mind ... and on numerous occasions is distinguished from, yet directly linked with, the Father and the Son as co-workers and co-recipients of worship.”<sup>22</sup> Church father Origen A.D. 185-254 references the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament saying, “We are of the opinion that his distinction may be observed in the Old Testament also, as when it is said, ‘He that giveth His Spirit to the people who are upon the earth, and Spirit to them who walk thereon’ for without doubt, everyone who walks upon the earth is a partaker also of the Holy Spirit, receiving it from God.”<sup>23</sup>

Although, neither Origen nor Herrick may be referencing children in these statements, one could conclude that the statement “everyone in the earth” includes children, infants and sucklings; that to be led by, taught or sealed and convicted by the Holy Spirit again includes children. If one is taught and led by the Holy Spirit, He becomes personal. Dr. Louis Davis says, in his DMin Project, “The Holy Spirit is personal. The Holy Spirit is not an unfriendly spiritual influence.”<sup>24</sup> He goes on to say, “In John 14:6, Jesus Christ proclaimed, ‘and I will pray to the Father, and He will give

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<sup>21</sup> Greg Herrick. “Pneumatology: The Holy Spirit” *An Introduction to Christian Belief: A Layman’s Guide*. June 3, 2004, accessed November 12, 2016, Bible.org. <https://bible.org>.

<sup>22</sup> Herrick, “Pneumatology: The Holy Spirit,” 1.

<sup>23</sup> James Richardson. *Origen De Principiis Book 1 Chapter III*. – On the Holy Spirit section 4 and 5 *Quotes from the Early Church Fathers*: “The Holy Spirit.” March 19, 2015, accessed November 12, 2016, [www.apostles-creed.org](http://www.apostles-creed.org).

<sup>24</sup> Louis Davis, *Training Children in a United Methodist Church to Hear from God and to Minister to Adults*, DMin Project (Dayton, Ohio: United Theological Seminary, 2016), 90.

you another Helper that He may abide with you forever.’ A Helper would not be any good without Him being personal.”<sup>25</sup> For clarity, the Holy Spirit for believers (note: children included) leads, guides, protects, speaks, seals, teaches and is personal.

Let’s consider a more modern approach, or thoughts on the theology of the Holy Spirit. How does the denomination of the Disciples of Christ view the Holy Spirit? According to the Disciples’ web site, “The denomination is a mainline Protestant Christian denomination in the Reformed tradition. The denomination allows each individual congregation and individual Christian to believe and practice what they believe. Their lack of defined doctrinal boundaries has resulted in the denomination becoming one of the most theologically liberal churches in America today.”<sup>26</sup>

Denominationally, the Holy Spirit is expressed through the priesthood of all believers. A quote from the Disciples of Christ identity statement says, “We affirm the priesthood of all believers, rejoicing in the gifts of the Holy Spirit – which include the gift of leadership – that God has given for the common good.”<sup>27</sup>

The Disciples of Christ denomination presents its doctrine by saying, “The Disciples of Christ (DOC), officially called the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), is a denomination emphasizing Christian unity, inclusiveness and social action. The official

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<sup>25</sup> Davis, *Training Children*, 90.

<sup>26</sup> *Who Are The Disciples of Christ, and What Do They Believe?* accessed November 26, 2016, <https://gotquestions.org>.

<sup>27</sup> *Disciples of Christ Identity Statement and Principles. Principals of Christ Identity Statement*, accessed November 26, 2016, <http://disciples.org/our-identity/identity-statement-and-principles>.

website statement says, “Disciples are a movement for wholeness in a fragmented world.”<sup>28</sup>

If every believer is a part, the church is not fragmented and the church is inclusive, then this doctrinal thought leaves the ministry of children open to thrive and become an effective department of the church. The Christian church rejoices in the gifts of the Holy Spirit; although these gifts were not made specific, the Holy Spirit is spoken of as given by God for the common good. The Holy Spirit speaking through children as they hear from God and pray for one another, would seem a welcome element to the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

### **Kingdom Theology**

In the discussion of the New Testament passage Matthew 18:1-6, Jesus is found using a child as an illustration. Marcia Bunge says, “The New Testament depicts children in striking and even radical ways as moral witnesses, models of faith for adults, sources or vehicles of revelation and representatives of Jesus. In the Gospels, we see Jesus embracing children and rebuking those who would turn them away, healing them and even lifting them up as models of faith.”<sup>29</sup>

In our New Testament Scripture Matthew 18:1-6, Jesus uses this as a Kairotic teaching moment for the disciples. They believed that they understood the kingdom

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<sup>28</sup> *Christian Research Journal*. “The Churches of Christ, The Christian Churches, the Disciples of Christ,” accessed November 26, 2016, [www.disciplesofChrist.com](http://www.disciplesofChrist.com).

<sup>29</sup> Marcia J. Bunge. *A More Vibrant Theology of Children*. Center for Christian Ethics (Baylor University: 2003), 13 accessed November 12, 2016, <http://www.baylor.edu.ifl.christianreflection/ChildrenarticleBunge.pdfchildren>.

because they had seen Jesus demonstrate power over demons, all manner of sickness and mental disorders. Jesus, the man, operated in kingdom-authority over all things. The disciples, and all those around, gave God praise and glory, but did they understand the Kingdom presentations made by Jesus? Pastor and speaker, Miles Monroe, makes this comment regarding the misconception of Jesus, “I believe no one who has ever lived has been misunderstood more than the young teacher who happened to be born, not by preference but by promise, through the line of the Old Testament Hebrew patriarch Abraham—Jesus the Christ.”<sup>30</sup>

These miracles and blessings of Jesus that overpowered what seemed like natural impossible barriers led the disciples into a big-headed power play. Since they were with Jesus and all of this wonder was a part of his powerful Kingdom, then which one, who, would be the greatest? Jesus ignores their question at first and gives them criteria for kingdom citizenship. Jesus takes a child, seemingly close by, and tells the disciple, “This is what the kingdom is like.” How can this be? Could Jesus have given the wrong answer? There was so much adultness and position-seeking that Jesus had to reach for a child to demonstrate what the kingdom was really like, and I believe the disciples were indignant. Tim Beilharz says;

Before addressing the question of greatness, Jesus first addresses the requirements for entrance into the kingdom. He exhorts the disciples, “I tell you the truth, unless you be converted as little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (vs. 3).

He then gives the requirement for salvation—to be converted with the faith and humility of a little child. The word “converted” (“strophō” in the Greek) means “to turn, an active and voluntary turning from sin.” It means to be converted to God with all your heart; a supernatural change that man by himself cannot make. It is far more than a mental acknowledgement of the truth or intellectual assent. It is a change which God Himself produces as the Holy Spirit

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<sup>30</sup> Myles Munroe, *Understanding Your Place in God's Kingdom* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image Publishers, Inc. 2006), 18.

bestows divine grace. Jesus is teaching that a young child is capable of having saving faith. Why would He tell us to become as a child and be born into God's kingdom, to have a childlike faith if little children are unable to understand the truths of salvation? The child is the key to heaven.<sup>31</sup>

Let's consider if this is more than just a teaching in being childlike in humility, trust and unpretentious. Matthew 18 states, "you must change and be like this child to enter the Kingdom of heaven." To move in kingdom business in the supernatural moves of God, the disciples needed something different; they needed to change. The disciples are told to welcome the child who is also justified by the Spirit of God. What is the theology of the Kingdom of heaven? Does Kingdom theology reflect on man's ability through the Holy Spirit to restore order in the earth until the return of Christ?

Lee C. Camp, assistant Professor of Christian Ethics, Lipscomb University of Nashville, TN. in his book *Mere Discipleship* says, "The new kingdom is 'otherworldly' only in the sense that it is the will of the Father who is in heaven." The new kingdom is very 'this worldly' in the sense that the kingdom calls us to participate in God's will and reign even now, in the midst of human history."<sup>32</sup>

Albert James Dager, editor and publisher of *Media Spotlight*, a biblical analysis of religious and secular media, offers the following as a brief definition of Kingdom theology:

The basic premise of Kingdom Theology is that man lost dominion over the earth when Adam and Eve succumbed to Satan's temptation in the Garden of Eden. God "lost control" of the earth to Satan at that time and has since been looking for a "covenant people" who will be His "extension," or "expression," in the earth and take dominion back from Satan. This is to be accomplished through certain "overcomers" who, by yielding themselves to the authority of God's apostles and

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<sup>31</sup> Tim Beilharz. Youth Ministry. *Developing a Theology of Children*, accessed October 26, 2016, <https://www.youthworks.net/articles/developing-a-theology-of-children>.

<sup>32</sup> Lee C. Camp. *Mere Discipleship: Radical Christianity in a Rebellious World*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2003), 58.

prophets for the Kingdom Age, will take control of the kingdoms of this world. These kingdoms are defined as all social institutions, such as the "kingdom" of education, the "kingdom" of science, the "kingdom" of the arts, and so on.<sup>33</sup>

Jesus wanted the disciples to have such childlike faith and trust that they could operate in the supernatural power of His kingdom. In the *Communicator's Commentary on Matthew*, Myron S. Augsburger, President & Professor Emeritus, Eastern Mennonite College & Seminary, and well-known evangelist says, "The issue is now the character of greatness. Jesus answered by calling a child to his knee and used the child as an object-lesson. He informed them that one becomes a kingdom member only by being converted and becoming as a child, for such are great in kingdom terms."<sup>34</sup> Augsburger goes on with further explanation saying:

This statement is emphatic; its force being shown in the Greek by the use of the double negative. Note that He does not say 'become as little children,' but 'be converted and become as little children.' Jesus is also modeling the child-to-Father relationship as in the Jewish literature, Abba places you in a learning relationship with the Father, to enter the kingdom of God.<sup>35</sup>

This writer would redefine James Dager's kingdom definition, not agreeing with the statement that God lost control of the Earth, because this writer sees God as always knowledgeable and never out of control. Clarifying my position, by helping children to hear the voice of God would be to increase their faith in a God that is alive, well and in control. I believe that Jesus demonstrated signs and wonders to help humankind to know God and to advance his kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. God had good plans for them

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<sup>33</sup> Albert James Dager, *Examination of the Kingdom*. Media Spotlight. Part 4 ApologeticsIndex.org. "An Examination of Kingdom Theology," accessed November 4, 2016, <http://www.apologeticsindex.org/101.html>.

<sup>34</sup> Myron S. Augsburger, "Matthew" *The Communicator's Commentary*, ed. Lloyd Ogilvie, (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1982), 214.

<sup>35</sup> Myron S. Augsburger. "Matthew," 215.

and wanted them well, safe and full of confidence in him. I would agree with an early statement made in the overview of Dager's article where he says, "The manifestations of the power of the Spirit are as valid for us today as they were for the first-century Church. If anything, they are more needed today than ever. We must jealously guard the gifts, and not misuse them as has been the custom of many who, overcome with zeal, have thwarted the work of God in their lives."<sup>36</sup> Today is the day to validate the voice of God still in the earth, and what better place to start than with the children.

Teaching the children to hear God is similar to Eli instructing Samuel to hear and answer the voice of God; also similar to Solomon the king praying and hearing from God. We must not be blind to God still speaking in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. In our historical chapter, we are reminded that children began prayer revivals that spread throughout the continent of Europe and on to the New England shores, igniting Holy Ghost fire in individuals, while they were still children, to later become powerful preachers of the Word. Children were exhorting, speaking, and praying into the lives of people in revival and camp meetings. This is not a new thing, but a resurgence of what God has for the body and for the Spirit to come to fruition.

In the Child Theology movement, Leigh High makes these comments and questions in an article, "Child Theology Futures":

If God has a kingdom, it is not like any kingdom of the world. If it is so radically unlike, as the Crucified Lord reveals, what is the value of using the language of Kingdom? Can God's Kingdom be seen or realized in this present world? But have we at the moment anywhere else to live and be human than this present world? The disciples, then and now, do not easily seek the Kingdom of God. The pursuit of greatness makes sense to them. They do not have patience to stay with God in the hour of his grieving. This can be seen in much of the rhetoric around mission and Christian action for children today. Often the kingdom of God is

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<sup>36</sup> Dager, "Overview," 1.



presented as a project of social transformation, which can or will be realized in the near future, because it is God's will, and provided we put in the practical effort, for which we have resources of money and intelligence.<sup>37</sup>

Churches today have elaborate marketing schemes to draw people to God such as proper lighting, short and quick "out of there" nugget messages and services designed to only take 65 to 90 minutes of a congregant's day. These are believed to be necessary for today, rather than soaking prayer and songs that move the heart of people out of the way and glorify God with signs and wonders. Social care for those in need is a work of the body, but not stripped of the power of God who gives to all. Can we begin to bring up a generation that will love the presence of God more and desire the best spiritual gifts of God? The body of Christ is in need of her supernatural fresh coat of paint. In this project, it is our desire that teaching will seek to transform the lives of children by helping them to hear God's voice, like young Samuel. The children will be given instructions of how to listen and recognize the voice of God and follow through in praying what they have heard.

### **Conclusion**

Acknowledging children as vessels of honor with their adult counterparts helps us to understand their worth in ministry. It is theologically sound for the Holy Spirit to lead, guide and speak to children. Just as the Holy Spirit spoke to Samuel and David, to Josiah, and Solomon, to Joseph and the babe in Elizabeth's womb, so can the Holy Spirit speak to our children today. Like many of the children or youth of the Scripture, the child did

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<sup>37</sup> Leigh High, "Child Theology Futures," *The Child Theology Movement Inc.* Report of discussions with John Collier. (July 2016), 10.

not always understand and have a teacher to give instruction. If we are teaching children to pray the Lord's Prayer or the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm, we are teaching about a supernatural act through faith to talk to a supernatural God. In our teaching, it is important to teach children the sovereign will of God, and not their idea of what they are to pray, so nothing in our teaching borders on heresy. It is important that our children have a spiritual foundation rich in the presence of God. Our children must be given the opportunity to minister to the church out of their own experiences.

Theology on the ministry of children is sparse for most theology that mentions children deals with the family and the structure of father, wife and children. To restate a thought from Bunge's statement in her article "A More Vibrant Theology of Children:"

Lurking behind our lack of commitment to children in the church and the wider culture are several simplistic views of children and our obligations to them. In a consumer culture, the "market mentality" molds our attitudes toward children as not having inherent worth, but as being commodities, consumers, or even economic burdens.<sup>38</sup>

If what Bunge says is true and the church thinks, as the world culture, that children are a commodity and are consumers in the kingdom, it is heart-breaking and may someday God may have a question that demands an answer. Recalling our New Testament Scripture Matthew 18:6, "If anyone causes one of these little ones who believes in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea." Our incorrect thinking regarding children is in crucial need of an about-face. Bill Johnson says, "If you don't change the way you perceive things, you'll live your whole life thinking that what you see in the natural is the superior reality. Without changing the way, you think you'll never see the

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<sup>38</sup> Marcia J. Bunge, "A More Vibrant Theology of Children," 12-13.

world that is right in front of you”<sup>39</sup> I say that world is the ministry of children. Bill Johnson is speaking about turning around for repentance, but the concept is the same for the incorrect paradigm about children in the church.

These are themes that are reflected throughout literature on children in the culture, as presented in the Biblical Foundations chapter and Historical chapter. To counter this worldview, our Christian perspective should tell us that children are gifts from God, in need of instruction and guidance. In her article, Marcia Bunge adds to the Christian view, “Children are models of faith, sources of revelation and the representative of Jesus, though they be orphans, neighbors, or strangers, who need to be treated with justice and integrity.”<sup>40</sup> This is the core of this project. I believe that Jesus, by pulling children into the teaching moment, into the healing and deliverance moment, demonstrated an opportunity for the ministry of children. They were there as witnesses, they were there as models of faith and they saw the revelation of the wonder of Jesus. This idea is as striking today as it was then to the disciples. Today it is rare for adults to learn from children. Timothy Coltvet is one of the unusual persons that has a testimony about the ministry of children. He is an advocate for children, having worked as a children’s Pastor for years, and says this:

Our worship needs the presence of children—not because the church is aging or dwindling or losing its gusto, and not because the children are our only hope for survival. Rather, we need children in worship because that shows that we are following the prophetic reach of Jesus Christ. When we view Jesus’ life and

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<sup>39</sup> Bill Johnson, *When Heaven Invades Earth: A Practical Guide to a Life of Miracles* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image Publishers, 2003), 38.

<sup>40</sup> Bunge, “A More Vibrant Theology of Children,” 12.

ministry, his signal to us regarding children and youth is to include them, to celebrate them, and to draw them into the center of the room.<sup>41</sup>

This project will draw children into the center by welcoming the innate power of God within them, preparing them to pray for one another and grow in their personal spiritual relationship.

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<sup>41</sup> Timothy J. Coltvet, 2013. "Jesus' Prophetic Reach: Drawing Children to the Center of Congregational Life." *Word & World* 33, no. 3: 288-295, accessed November 23, 2016, ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **THEORETICAL FOUNDATION**

Children are the product of God's goodness and grace to the human race and training, teaching and nurturing them is an intricate adventure for all who will walk the journey with them. There is sufficient literature on how to teach children, and ample resources and training manuals on ministry to children. This theoretical paper will select and present information regarding resources that are focusing on the ministry of children. In other words, ministries or resources that are developing ways to allow the ministry of the child to go forth and produce fruit in the kingdom of God.

This paper will investigate a couple of denominational curriculums that teach and promote their theology to see if there are lessons or methods for teaching children to hear the voice of God. Some of the resources are academic Christian teaching methods while others are produced by those who have been touched by the ministry of a child in their lives, and it has changed their perspective on how they see the ministry of children. This search will see if and how these resources will support or not support this project.

Keeping in mind our theme: Children hearing from God and praying for their peers, this theoretical research will seek to present some current information about how children are taught about hearing God. As previously discussed the church is very comfortable with training, teaching and raising children, without the component of training to operate in the power of the Holy Spirit. As they grow older, it is shown that

children's early "church involvement" quickly becomes to them childish, cute, fun and they fall away or begin to question the teaching of the church. Perhaps more is needed in our children's Biblical curriculum that would help children experience the power and presence of God through the Holy Spirit.

### **Denomination Resources**

The first resource is from a main-stream Presbyterian denomination. Great Commission Publications [GCP] is a ministry of the Committee on Christian Education of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and the Committee on Discipleship Ministries of the Presbyterian Church in America. The nonprofit corporation is jointly run by a representative Board of Trustees consisting of ministers and elders from both churches. The curriculum is based on teaching children about Jesus. On their site, the children's director, B. A. Snider, wrote this describing their passion and direction for children:

As a children's director for 20-plus years, I have often dreamed that when I get to heaven, God will ask me, "What did you teach my children?" Without a doubt, I want my answer to be, "I taught them about your Son, Jesus." Not only do I want my children to know the stories of the New Testament about Jesus' birth, life, death, and resurrection, but I want them to know the stories of the Old Testament that point to Jesus.

Our goal at Great Commission Publications is to make Jesus the main point of every story whether it's found in the Old Testament or New Testament."<sup>1</sup>

The site also gave Scriptural foundational development for their curriculum:

We are to teach our children the great and powerful works of our God. We are to teach them God's Word, His law, and His gospel as part of His covenant people. We are to teach them the "things that we have heard and known, that our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children but tell to the coming

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<sup>1</sup> B. A. Snider, *Great Commission Publications*, accessed December 3, 2016, <https://www.gcp.org/Default.aspx>.

generation the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might, and the wonders that he has done ... that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children, so that they should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God but keep his commandments (Psalm 78:3–4, 6–7, RSV).”<sup>2</sup>

This Scripture immediately caught my attention for it defined for me my calling to the ministry of children. Recently, in re-reading and seeking God in prayer with this Scripture, I gathered additional insight from this passage. When telling the story, it must result in children who will set their hope in God and not forget the works of God. I believe hope in God is a supernatural result from practicing acknowledging the presence of God, as hearing is a supernatural result of actively listening for God’s Word. So, this Scripture admonishes adults to lead children to the presence of God, making Him known in their life while they are still children. I believe this can be one critical criterion question in the development of a children’s curriculum that might be developed later; i.e., how does this curriculum help make God known to the child? As a result, this Scripture helped to focus my search for resources relating to how they might lead a child into getting in touch with the supernatural God and His power, so that He might be known. How might a curriculum develop hope and faith in prayer? And finally, how would this curriculum resource advance this project? So, my question for the Presbyterian curriculum is, how did the Presbyterian church children’s curriculum lead to getting children in touch with the supernatural power of God that he might be known?

Continuing with the curriculum from the Presbyterian Church, the sample shown on the website is an excellent example of teaching about the creation in Genesis. It is a well-organized, teacher-guided lesson. The lesson included the story of the home God

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<sup>2</sup> Snider, *Great Commission Publications*, 1.

made for each of his creations, with a song, memory verse, scripted parent sheet and prayer, to close, thanking God for what he had made. Although this is an excellent curriculum for children, there was not any mention of the presence of the Holy Spirit or the supernatural power of God being demonstrated in the creation. This curriculum did not meet my criteria for an effective resource for this project.

The Disciples of Christ denomination identifies itself with people being spiritual beings connected to God through the Holy Spirit. Would the Disciples of Christ resources have materials to help teach children to hear from God and pray for their peers?

On their website The Disciples of Christ identity is repeated:

As Christ's disciples, we have the privilege to embrace deep Christian spirituality as a mark of our identity.

In his book *20/20 Vision*, former General Minister and President Dick Hamm offers a working definition of Christian spirituality as “. . . a way of life that relates who and what we are to who and what God is as revealed in Jesus Christ and as experienced through the Holy Spirit.” As Disciples, our spirit is refreshed by the model and ministry of Jesus that is revealed to us through the Holy Spirit. When we give careful attention to God's revealing of God's self, our inner life is strengthened so that we may be poured out on behalf of God's beloved children — all of them.<sup>3</sup>

I was encouraged that the Disciples followed the model and ministry of Jesus. Knowing that Jesus spoke to and listened to his Father daily, perhaps their curriculum would have insight and practice about hearing God. The Christian Church information was filled with global mission work, women's and men's work, colleges, fellowships and summits, making it a very busy church. After speaking to several persons in the denomination who are involved with the children I found that the design of each church allows them to select their own materials. On the Disciples Home Missions Family and

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<sup>3</sup> *The Justice Primer*, accessed Dec. 5, 2016, <http://disciples.org/resources/spirituality/>.



Children's Ministries web page highlighted two main resources. *Worship and Wonder* curriculum, a story-telling format from the book by Sonja M Stewart and Jerome W. Berryman, *Young Children and Worship*. Sonja M. Stewart is Professor of Christian Education and Director of the Master of Religious Education Program at Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Michigan and Jerome W. Berryman is Director of the Saint Francis Center for Godly Play, Houston, Texas. They present their children's program throughout the United States through workshops and training sessions. This curriculum is officially endorsed by the Disciples of Christ Christian Church Denomination for their children's ministries. The approach of Children's Worship and Wonder as described by, Faith formation researchers Rev. Dr. Ivy Beckwith and Rev. Dr. Kristina Lizardy-Hajbi. Dr. Lizardy-Hajbi comments on the website about the book. "based around a unique story-telling format that invites children into God's stories and gives them tools to participate in God's bigger story. The worship approach provides rituals and spiritual disciplines that are practiced each week"<sup>4</sup> The book helps teachers to introduce children ages three to seven the wonder of worship. In the introduction one of the authors, Jerome Berryman describes the contents of the book's teaching;

What follows is a way of being in worship with young children. It is a way that both you and the children can grow in love for God and for one another. It uses a sensorimotor style of storytelling as a primary means for encountering God, so God is experienced, not just learned about. It gives appropriate freedom, so young children can respond to stories of God through continued working with the story figures and art materials. It enables young children to bring their lived experience into dialogue with God in the biblical stories. And remarkable, it provides a way for young children to tell the stories of God to others.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Ivy Beckwith and Kristina Lizardy-Hajbi "About" *Young Children and Worship*, accessed March 20, 2018. <http://www.docfamiliesandchildren.org/cww>.

<sup>5</sup> Sonja M. Stewart and Jerome W. Berryman. *Young Children and Worship* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1989), 13.

Berryman and Stewart say, “The activities and order of the curriculum were developed around the worship order of the Reformed churches: assemble in God’s name; proclaim God’s word; give thanks to God; go in the God’s name”<sup>6</sup>

The Disciples of Christian also have an activity called, Light a Candle for Children which is an advocacy and prayer vigil for the five weeks leading up to Children's Sabbath each October. “Children’s Sabbath is defined as an annual program designed to promote awareness of children’s needs and our responsibility to meet their needs.”<sup>7</sup> In an introduction to the blessing prayer, Rev. Elsa Peters, United Church of Christ, writes why and how to pray for the children. Rev. Peters says,

Even as we experience the assurance of God’s love and mercy, we must still struggle with the justice issues facing our children. In some of our churches, children living in poverty and in violence are unknown to the church family. While these children remain in our prayers, we cannot see their faces in our regular gatherings for worship. Most of our congregations do have children – whom we love and adore. On this particular Sunday, bless the children that you can see, and invite, imaginatively, children whom you cannot see, but who still need the blessing of our commitment to justice for them. During the Children’s Time, or at a special separate moment in worship, invite all of the children forward. Invite adults to encircle these children and extend their hands over the children, as one person prays.

The website gives this information about, Light a Candle for Children,

Thousands of congregations from multiple faith groups unite during Children’s Sabbath weekend to simultaneously witness for children through prayer, education, and worship. You can receive a manual from The Children’s Defense Fund that will help in the planning of your Children’s Sabbaths Observation. This manual provides worship and educational materials for Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, Bahá’í, and other faith traditions. It also includes resources for interfaith gatherings. The manual offers bulletin inserts, ideas for hands-on

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<sup>6</sup> Stewart and Berryman, Back Cover page.

<sup>7</sup> Elsa Peters, United Churches of Christ, “Prayer of Blessings” October 16, 2011. accessed March 22, 2018. <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2011/10/childrens-sabbath-prayer-of-blessing.html>.

service and advocacy efforts, guidance for strengthening your efforts for children throughout the year, and much more. Churches and individuals can subscribe online to daily mediations contributed by fellow Disciples and partners in the United Church of Christ.<sup>8</sup>

Children's Sunday sounds exciting and celebrates children as active participants in the life of the church. This activity shows the interest and involvement of the church with their children. There are lock in's, programs with the children in leadership roles, games and songs that invest time and volunteers with the children of Disciples of Christ. These were excellent programs but did not mention teaching children to hear from God and to pray for others.

One youth pastor in the Disciples of Christ stated that, "Camp Christian has the most involvement of the church in terms of children and youth. The camp is broken into multiple age groups each visiting the facility for a week-long experience with other children and for interactive small groups or classes. Most classes relate social issues and a sense of the mission of the church to the Scripture."<sup>9</sup> He would not say whether there was a specific curriculum used or if there were lessons on hearing from God or implementing hearing from God. Most of the churches taught Bible stories, using storyteller methods, puppets and social situations. The beliefs of who is Christ, who is God and the Holy Spirit, and how we serve and love one another was the common ground of the teaching syllabus.

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<sup>8</sup> Family and Children's ministry, Disciples Home Mission. Accessed March 22, 2018. <http://www.docfamiliesandchildren.org/light-a-candle-for-children-prayer-vigil>.

<sup>9</sup> Youth Pastor, Disciples of Christ Christian Church, at Georgia Regional Meeting, December 7, 2016.

My own knowledge, gleaned while serving as the minister to children in this denomination, agrees with the youth pastor. I would add that children are important to this church as each church has a component for children. Children's sermons and various activities and even areas designated for children are provided with each church Education Director choosing the curriculum best for their setting.

As Minister to Children at a predominantly African-American Christian Church we have used *Urban Ministries Inc.*<sup>10</sup> curriculum because it depicts relevant black children, families and situations. This curriculum was selected by the Minister of Christian Education as the best suited for our setting. Having used this program, it adequately tells the stories of the Bible, using scenarios that relate to minority children, not just African-American, but others ethnicities as well. The teen book looks like the latest magazine with great pictures and short stories not only relevant to the culture, but also to the educational studies that show the limited attention span of children today. So, the course is now designed to have short reads and discussion with some take-away, all around Scripture. The Disciples of Christ denomination did not have materials on teaching children to hear from God and pray for others.

Another curriculum examined was *Children Desiring God: God Centered Resources for Training the Next Generation*. This resource describes itself as:

Children Desiring God exists to equip the body of Christ to spread to the next generations a passion for the supremacy of God in all things for the joy of all peoples through Jesus Christ. Our aim is to impart to children a vision of God, who He is, and who we are in relation to Him, and to establish them with a foundation of doctrine and truth. We want them biblically grounded, seeing God as the hero of every story, with a God-centered world view and a faith that will

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<sup>10</sup> Urban Ministries Inc. "About Us," accessed December 26, 2016, <https://urbanministries.com/>.

hold them when the days of testing come. We want them to love the Lord their God with all their heart, and to delight in Him forever.<sup>11</sup>

The Southern Baptists list this curriculum as a Baptist program. This resource, *Children Desiring God*, gave outlines for in-depth teachings on salvation and sanctification in their examples. These are often seen as difficult themes to teach children so I made contact with *Children Desiring God* to inquire if they might have curriculum or literature for teaching children to hear from God and pray for others. Their Customer Care representative responded to my question:

We have a curriculum that helps children study prayer: *Lord, Teach Us to Pray*. You are welcome to read through the scope and sequence (with lesson overviews) or the curriculum sample to find out more about this study. We also have a booklet for parents and church leaders to help them incorporate prayer into their daily lives: *Utter Dependency on Prayer*.<sup>12</sup>

This was an excellent teacher/learner resource for teaching children, but I did not find ways to teach or lead children into God's presence where they would hear from God in their spirit. I did not find any examples of how to listen to the voice of God in this curriculum. The story of Samuel was a part of this curriculum, just as the story of Samuel is often a recurring message used in children's curriculums. The record of Samuel is often used as an example of a child being called who later becomes influential in the life of Israel. Curriculums ignore that Samuel served as a priest before God as a child with his own ephod. Samuel is often used as the premier character, although Noah, Abraham and Paul are also Biblical characters used in teaching children about God speaking to humans.

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<sup>11</sup> *Children Desiring God*, accessed December 4, 2016, <http://www.childrendesiringgod.org/curriculum/>.

<sup>12</sup> Suzy Plocher, Customer Service Representative. *Children Desiring God*, accessed December 5, 2016, <http://www.childrendesiringgod.org/>.

Thus far most curriculums give great instructions on speaking to God, and a few call attentions to listening to hear an answer from God or hearing the voice of God.

Urban Ministries Inc. [UMI] an African-American Christian curriculum, describes their program as:

We offer a wide array of publications and media products that speak directly to African American culture. Designed by leading Christian educators, the material includes comprehensive teaching guides, Sunday school curriculum, intensive Bible studies, kid-friendly Vacation Bible School activities and so much more! Pastors will love our Bible commentaries, all written by some of the most prolific black theologians in the country, while Sunday School teachers will appreciate our helpful leader's guides, which make lesson planning a breeze. So, whether you are in leadership at your church or just an individual with a desire for more in-depth study of God's Word, UMI has you covered.<sup>13</sup>

As stated above, I am familiar with this curriculum. This resource previously used the KJV of Scripture; recently they began using the New International Version. The curriculum highlights social issues facing the black community, which are often slightly different than the majority culture. Looking for themes to assist with this project I found this resource to have great teaching about the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. Lessons on being led by the Holy Spirit were excellent and centered on problems and circumstance in life. Prayer topics focused on the believer praying and demonstrating faith in prayer; all excellent but did not address our project.

The Pentecostal Publishers' children's ministry site gave a basic description of materials that taught the doctrines: "Salvation • Oneness of God • Christ-like Living • Holy Living • Body of Christ • Word of God • Overcoming Sin • Witnessing • Discipline • Respect."<sup>14</sup> There were examples of several lessons on God is One, using Deut. 4:6 as

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<sup>13</sup> Urban Ministries Inc. "About Us," accessed December 26, 2016, <https://urbanministries.com/>.

<sup>14</sup> Pentecostal Publishers, accessed December 9, 2016, <https://pentecostalpublishing.com/attachment/product/5983/10d4k-preview.pdf?fileextension=pdf>.

the Scripture source. The lesson brought in other gods from other major religious sects.

Another example gave a skit about the boldness of a witness to tell the enemy, no, as well as how to witness. There were handouts for the children about how to treat others, and how the world saw you as the body of Christ. The world was mean and cruel and in the body of Christ was goodness and kindness. There was also an interesting pledge worth quoting:

I pledge today to do my best to hear and do the things that God has set forth in His Holy Word. If I will hear and do these things, I am building a foundation in my life that is like a rock. I can build an incredible life on the doctrines of the Bible. Regardless of what others do or say, I will never water down, change or deny these truths.<sup>15</sup>

The site contained numerous teachings; the one on King Josiah was only adult oriented. I found information regarding receiving the Holy Spirit and being baptized in the Spirit. I did not find curriculum examples for children's prayer other than memorization of the Lord's Prayer and other passages. All worthy but not on point to our project.

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<sup>15</sup> Pentecostal Publishers. *Pentecostal Curriculum Example*. "The Pledge," accessed December 9, 2016, <https://pentecostalpublishing.com/attachment/product/5983/10d4k-preview.pdf?fileextension=pdf>.

### Academic Resources

Dr. Steve Armstrong, a professor of Science and Math at Letourneau University Interdenominational Institute of Higher Learning has several curriculums on family devotions and teaching children. Dr. Armstrong has prepared Sunday school lessons that are labeled “life truths, life ventures, life values, life matters, life words, life lessons, Bible studies for life!”<sup>16</sup> Dr. Armstrong presents his material in what one could classify as a traditional behavioral learning method.

According to William Yount, Traditional Behavioral learning methodology is defined as, “the oldest educational system ... it is the behavior of students that is the focus, both their academic and social skills. It asks how my lesson will help develop academic and interpersonal skills that form the basis for future learning and actions.”<sup>17</sup>

Yount goes on to quote from Matthew 7:24 “Jesus said, ‘Everyone who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a sensible man who built his house on the rock.’ How do we help learners practice in life what they hear in class?”<sup>18</sup>

Dr. Armstrong’s lessons are laid out to involve the student in a relational interactive encounter in a traditional behavioral method and he closes his lesson with what is called a “take-away.”

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<sup>16</sup> Steve Armstrong. Christian Sunday School Curriculum, Life Way 2016, accessed December 7, 2016, [http://www.letu.edu/people/stevearmstrong/SundaySchool/sunday\\_school\\_lessons.htm](http://www.letu.edu/people/stevearmstrong/SundaySchool/sunday_school_lessons.htm).

<sup>17</sup> William Yount, *Created to Learn, Second Ed. A Christian Teacher’s Introduction to Educational Psychology*, (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2010), 171.

<sup>18</sup> Yount, *Created*, 171.



Dr. Armstrong's lessons are designed and explained as follows:

Each lesson begins with a "Motivation" or "Hook" section. This is a question which is usually of the "brain storming" variety. Its purpose is to get learners thinking along the line of the lesson topic and to raise interest in the subject. This section is followed by a "transition" which brings together the motivation question and announces exactly what the lesson covers.

The Bible Study portion proceeds through each of the three or four scripture passages. I am a firm believer that when a Bible lesson is taught or preached, listener/learners should be looking at three things: what the Bible says, what it means, and how will they live differently as a result of the Truth encountered.

These elements are stressed in the "Let's Teach" online course. "The Book" "The Look" "The Took." To that end, I like to use questions which lead the learner through those three steps. You will notice that for each question stated, a series of possible answers are given in the lesson. Lawyers know that you should never ask a question in court for which you do not know the answer and the same thing applies in this context. The teacher should give some thought to the kinds of answers he/she is expecting ... all for the purpose of directing the thinking of the learners.<sup>19</sup>

This is an excellent educational teaching method that I have practiced in public and Christian school settings. This method may be useful in helping children to hear from God and pray for their peers.

ABeka Christian Curriculum is a Christian Curriculum created for homeschool as well as school programming. The ABeka program prides itself in being a Christian school with a platform against the secular learning system. ABeka teaches all academic subjects and the Bible as a part of its learning system. I put to the test in a search of its Bible curriculum my question about children praying.

Dr. Phyllis Rand a forty-year Christian School educator wrote in her article, *Teaching Traditions* about ABeka philosophy:

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<sup>19</sup> Steve Armstrong, Christian Sunday School Curriculum, accessed December 7, 2016, [http://www.letu.edu/people/stevearmstrong/SundaySchool/sunday\\_school\\_lessons.htm](http://www.letu.edu/people/stevearmstrong/SundaySchool/sunday_school_lessons.htm).

What we mean when we say we are traditional is this: American education, like our other institutions, was founded on a Christian worldview. American educational traditions are Christian.

Progressive education is the development of those who rejected the Christian worldview and traditions of their fathers and transferred their faith to science, evolution, and psychology. It is secular. It is humanistic. It is more than an attempt to just bring more freedom and activity into the classroom. It is not an exaggeration to say that progressive education under whatever name it goes by today is the greatest force in what Henry Morris calls “the war against God.” By its fruits, we can judge the damage of progressive methodology today: dumbed-down academics, self-centeredness, and rebelliousness.

So, when we speak of traditional and progressive education we mean two completely different ways of looking at the world. Because a man’s philosophy or worldview informs his thinking and practice, it is not surprising to learn that the methods and purposes of traditional and progressive educators are very different. We have a Christian worldview so our purpose and methods align more with traditional education than progressive education.

As Christians, we know that a child is born on one path, not going in God’s direction at all. God tells parents and teachers that we are to steer children toward another path so that they will choose to leave their natural one for God’s path. There is much important soul teaching to do. Classrooms are not child centered; they are in effect teacher centered. The progressive worldview rejects this and sees children as naturally good.<sup>20</sup>

This relates to the message of the theological paper, regarding the worldview that children are confronted with daily from the system. Often this view is met with little to no resistance. The view of children being born on a path going away from God was also one of the views discussed historically about children. Children needed training and discipline, which historically led to some very severe practices for children.

I was messaged by the Educational Advisor of ABeka regarding my inquiry on material content relating to children learning to hear from God and pray for others. This was her reply: “We don’t have a course specifically on the Holy Spirit. For the age group

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<sup>20</sup> Phyllis Rand, *A Beka Book Excellence in Education from a Christian Perspective*, Teaching Traditions. (Pensacola Fl. 2004), accessed December 7, 2016, <http://www.abeka.com/Resources/Articles/TeachingTraditions.aspx>.

you mentioned, we have a Bible kit that comes with 14 sets of Flash Cards you can use to teach from that include lessons on many Bible characters, salvation, parables, and other topics.”<sup>21</sup> I was stunned. I had hoped this might be a resource for teachers looking for help in teaching the moving of the Holy Spirit and how God might speak to a child in helping them to pray for others.

Education has such personalities as John Locke (1632 -1704) who propagated the idea of “man is a blank slate that the experience of the world writes upon to create understanding and personality.”<sup>22</sup> And Yount notes that Wilhelm Wundt (1832-1920) brought in the elements of learning through introspection. Introspective learning is described as, “calling for learners to learn to look within themselves to discover their feelings and sensations ... Or the educational law of effect, that response from learning is followed by pleasure or reward strengthens the association between the response and its stimulus.”<sup>23</sup>

How is this important in our discussion of the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit to speak to children? If children are taught to ask God how they should pray for someone and they hear from Him, would this be stimuli to cause a response and they would pray for others? As the project is designed and implemented will we see any of these educational philosophies realized or does the supernatural supersede the ways and thoughts of man? Wundt’s element of learning through introspection will be a part of our project design as the children are asked to journal. The journal is a reflection of their

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<sup>21</sup> A Beka Books, accessed Dec.7, 2016, <http://www.abeka.com/Resources/Articles/TeachingTraditions.aspx>.

<sup>22</sup> Yount, *Created*, 173.

<sup>23</sup> Yount, *Created*, 173-179.

thoughts on the teaching and implementation activity. The Law of Effect may be relevant to our study if, as observers, we record the children's response to praying for their peers; how that feels to those doing the praying and to those receiving prayer, and if that is a stimulus for continuing the actions. Although we are participating in a supernatural activity and one of faith, it is somewhat measurable and definable through the lens of education.

Cliff Schimmels, a 40-year veteran teacher and former professor of education at Wheaton College, writes this in his book *Teaching that Works*, "To teach God's Word as if it were simply an alternative lifestyle choice would be a disservice to God—and your students."<sup>24</sup> Schimmels' teaching method is based on 1 Peter 3:15. His method of being firm, fair and friendly will be necessary in our project. This project will not only teach children to hear from God, but teaching children always involves parental knowledge, permission and perhaps some participation. One of the ramifications of this project is that teaching children to have a connection with God may be life transforming. Ultimately the children that participate are being taught God is real, he hears you, he speaks and you can follow his lead.

Dr. Louis Davis in his DMin project spoke about questions people have about God.

From the very beginning, people have wondered and debated who God was and who God is. Some think that God is unknowable or unreachable. However, through the Holy Spirit we can know and reach God because the Holy Spirit is God. We can have a relationship with God because of the relationship that Jesus has with God. To go a step further, Jesus had the perfect association with God and

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<sup>24</sup> Cliff Schimmels. *Teaching that Works, Strategies from Scripture for Classrooms Today*. (Cincinnati, OH: Standard Publishing Co. 1999), 52.

now through the power and wisdom of the Holy Spirit we can participate in a close, personal relationship with God.<sup>25</sup>

Dr. Davis' statement is through the filter of an adult. In this project a parent introductory discussion group which will be introduced to the concept of the project in expectation of gaining insight into parents' perception of God and ways that the Holy Spirit works. The project may see parent's perceptions play out in the children's attitudes about praying or hearing from God. I believe a parent's perception is present when the parent is working with their child, This researcher would like to have some knowledge of this as it could be important to the success of any such endeavor.

One other thought raised by Schimmels is that of the "Aha" moment. Schimmels says, "There are times when our learning doesn't move forward in a gradual, continuous progression. We store facts in our brain ... we repeat, we recite but no progress ... then at a rare unexplained moment of insight we suddenly have clarity and we exclaim, 'Aha, now I know.'"<sup>26</sup> In this project, through observation, it will be helpful to see if progress in learning the curriculum is making sense and having an "Aha" effect on the children. Perhaps in journaling or in reflective discussion after sessions this phenomenon can be captured.

### **Curriculums That Teach Children to Minister**

*Kids in His Presence, Nurturing a Child's Affection for Papa God* is a ministry directed by Mike and Marilyn Seth, endorsed by Bill Johnson of Bethel Church, Redding,

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<sup>25</sup> Louis Davis. DMin Project. *Training Children in A United Methodist Church to Hear from God and to Minister to Adults* (Dayton, Ohio: United Theological Seminary, 2015), 89.

<sup>26</sup> Schimmels, *Teaching that Works*, 88.

California. Mike and Marilyn tell the story of their call to children's ministry and an understanding of an assignment from God. Mike recalls God speaking to him about the children. Mike explains his vision:

God speaks: "The children have no friends in this world" . . . A short while later on a Saturday afternoon, as I was lying on my bed, praying about the next day's service, the room suddenly got very warm and I could sense God's presence. Next, I heard in a clear voice, "Mike, the children have no friends in this world, I am their only Friend, I am their best friend." Hot tears gushed as I sobbed. The Father had touched my heart with His intense and yearning heart for children. That day my heart was branded with the Father's love."<sup>27</sup>

As years go by and as the ministry grows, Mike and Marilyn learn many things about ministering to children. Mike shares,

Children have a full-grown Holy Spirit. As we continued to be faithful to the "call", God would entrust to us some of the deepest treasure He holds in His heart: His love and affection for His children. We soon discovered that children, though young, possess a full-grown Holy Spirit. They could receive and be released to do anything Jesus said we could do. Accompanying this revelation, we were learning how to teach truths from God's Word in fun, captivating ways.<sup>28</sup>

To end this testimony, Mike and Marilyn tell how a shift was made from teaching children Bible stories and songs to affecting ministry that transformed children into ministers in the kingdom. Mike and Marilyn watched the wonders of God in the adult services at Bethel and knew that ministry to children could be more. Mike continues his testimony:

I now had a plan. And it was simple (it usually is when God is involved). I would begin to gather the deposits of heavenly activity and revelations and give it to our children. I felt the children deserved the same fresh "manna" that their parents were enjoying. As our young people began to encounter God's presence, the transformation was amazing. They learned to recognize and become intimate with the Father's love. They heard His voice and discovered who they were.

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<sup>27</sup> Mike Seth. *Kids in his Presence: Nurturing a Child's Affection for Papa God*. "Our Story," accessed December 9, 2016, <http://www.kidsinhispresence.com/our-story-details>.

<sup>28</sup> Mike Seth, *Kids in His Presence*.1.

Each week we would hear testimonies of what God was doing through our children in their homes, schools, and playgrounds. As His children, they became confident, they began to prophesy, and lay hands on the sick as their hunger for Papa God increased. God was convincing me that there were no truths or values of His Kingdom that could not be received and carried by children. They were created for revival!<sup>29</sup>

Mike's testimony supports this project. Children have the full Holy Spirit and desire fresh manna that they can only receive from hearing the voice of God. They can encounter the presence of God and be transformed.

Becky Fischer, Jennifer Toledo, and Bethel Church have curriculums that teach children to minister by empowering the children's lesson with more than the story, memory verse and take-away. Ms. Becky Fischer, Founder and director of The School of Supernatural Children's Ministry has a 45-hour training course that speaks to the theme of this paper:

It is a 45-hour training course which teaches parents and children's ministers the basics of great Spirit-empowered children's ministry. It also shows them how to teach children to hear God's voice, become worshipers, prayer warriors, and prophetic spokesmen. It also teaches them to heal the sick, operate in the gifts of the Spirit and be led by the Spirit.<sup>30</sup>

An example from Becky Fischer, *Kids in Ministry International*, was a lesson series entitled, "Hearing God's voice," or "Natural versus Supernatural." This was a powerful example of giving children knowledge of the supernatural realm.

The aim of the lesson gave a projected goal of teaching children that God created them as spiritual beings. A quote from the lesson outline reveals this lesson goal:

Our ultimate goal in this two-part series called the School of the Holy Spirit is to not only teach children about the gifts of the Spirit as detailed in 1 Corinthians 12-14, but to have them operating in the gifts while they are still young. So, to lay a

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<sup>29</sup> Mike Seth, *Kids in His Presence*. 1.

<sup>30</sup> Becky Fischer. *Kids in Ministry International Inc*. "About Us." Web site information, accessed December 10, 2016, <http://kidsinministry.org/about/becky-fischer/>.

solid biblical foundation demonstrating we as people have another side to our lives—a “spirit” side—we must go all the way back to the garden of Eden and learn exactly how man was made.

Understanding that man was created as a spirit-being is basic for teaching children how to listen to their spirits, which is where the Holy Spirit communicates with us. From birth, children learn about the world around them through the use of their five physical senses. They are completely unaware they have a spirit (or rather they are a spirit) unless they are taught. They need to learn at an early age there is another “world” or “dimension” in this life which is just as real as the world we can see with our eyes ... We have taken our time in this lesson to clearly explain the differences between the natural world we’re familiar with, and the spiritual world, and to also introduce terms which will be used frequently throughout this curriculum. But the truth is children can be drawn into the Spirit realm and be functioning at an amazing prophetic level with little to none of the teachings in this book, if this is the only goal. Though they may be intellectually ignorant of the spirit world, they function in it quite naturally.

But our purpose is to help them intellectually understand, as much as possible, how “fearfully and wonderfully” we are made in His image and to give them powerful experiences of hearing and responding to the voice of God. We want them to know how to hear God’s voice on purpose and not by accident! For this reason, these lessons are laced with numerous examples.<sup>31</sup>

Becky Fischer and her team have lessons that work for this project. The goals and aims are in agreement with the desired result of my project: to help children learn to hear from the Spirit of God and operate in the Spirit after hearing. Becky Fischer’s curriculum makes it apparent that it is necessary in this project to introduce children to a different language in the kingdom of God. Children are familiar with the terms salvation, baptism, repent or turn around, which have been discussed in previous curriculums.

This teaching offers outline directives needed for this project. In the theological section pneumology was explored as a part of ministry in children. This series “School of the Holy Spirit,” lesson one titled Natural vs-Supernatural, starts in Genesis where God made man and breathed into him the breath of life. In our theological section, we recall

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<sup>31</sup> Becky Fischer, *Kids in Ministry International Inc.* “School of the Holy Spirit Series,” accessed Dec. 11, 2016, <http://kidsinministry.org/about/becky-fischer/>.



breath or *Ruach* is the Hebrew word for Spirit. John 4:24 tells us God is a Spirit so, God the Spirit was breathed into mankind to create in him a living soul. Correlating this information with great visuals and examples is an excellent place to start in the six weeks of teaching. If children can identify themselves as Spiritual beings, it is believed they can better understand how God the Spirit can speak to them. This is exciting to help children know that God the Holy Spirit wants to talk to them. Stirring up the desire to hear from God, I believe, will create an excitement and desire and yield a good attendance in the six-week project.

Following foundational teaching, the Fischer series, introduces the concept of God wanting to talk to children. Fischer's lesson plans present instructions that assist in teaching children to listen in different ways. Fischer says, "We have to learn a new way to see and hear. (Hold up the comical eyes and rubber ears, placing them over your stomach.) We learn to see with our spirit eyes and hear with our spirit ears instead of our natural eyes and ears! The Holy Spirit is constantly trying to show us and tell us things, and we must learn how to listen to Him!"<sup>32</sup>

Becky Fischer's lessons give helpful examples of how to impart God's truths though this project. Helpful for this project are the examples given for praying in agreement with Scripture, yet another way to pray and hear from God. Much of this curriculum can be used in the six-week sessions of teaching children to hear God's voice and to pray for their peers.

Another curriculum resource relative and usable to this project comes from Jennifer Toledo's *Eyes That See and Ears That Hear: A Parent's Guide to Teaching*

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<sup>32</sup> Becky Fischer, *Kids in Ministry International Inc.* "School of the Holy Spirit Series."

*Their Children How to Hear the Voice of God.*<sup>33</sup> The Toledo resource book and workbook will be excellent in achieving parent involvement with journaling and conversations as well. Chapter Three, “Hearing God for Direction,” and Chapter Five, “Hearing God for Others” will provide two lessons of the teaching sessions of the project.

Both of these curriculums emphasize the importance of implementation of the teaching. Did learning take place? And if so how will it affect behavior? The project will plan for four specific opportunities for implementation of the goal by having children lead altar prayer for their peers during children’s church. These two curriculums give helpful structure for developing details for each teaching session and thoughts on how to effectively implement.

### **Conclusion**

This theoretical study presented resources most current in the area of teaching children the Scripture. The denominational teachings give instructions that are Biblical and sound in doctrine. Most curriculums are designed to teach a Bible story, or character, learn a memory verse and often apply the learning to current life situations. Although each curriculum presented excellent goals and aims for teaching, I found most teaching to be about God and Jesus. Most teachings tell the wonderful story of salvation and hope, grace, love, peace and prayer. Years and years have seen this method of delivery of the Word of God. It has worked for hundreds of thousands, but for hundreds of thousands

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<sup>33</sup> Jennifer Toledo, *Eyes That See and Ears That Hear: A Parent’s Guide to Teaching Their Children How to Hear the Voice of God*. (Dinuba. CA: Global Children’s Movement/Expression 58, 2007).

more it did not, they were unable to stay with the faith after early years of Sunday school training or catechisms.

Relational academic curriculums such as exemplified in Schimmels' book presented opportunities for great interaction with the lessons to make the Word of God more personal. Topics such as the Holy Spirit dwelling in us, or the power of the Holy Spirit in us, the same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead, were limited. Prayer in the denominational and academic curriculums investigated taught the Lord's Prayer as an outline for how to pray. Prayers for children seemed focused on learning to pray, asking God, or thanking him for blessings.

There are curriculums that spoke to the subject of prayer, but it was in the curriculums of Jennifer Toledo and Becky Fischer that another level of presenting the truths of the Bible specifically centered on hearing from God before praying. These curriculums lend themselves to the project. Their shift in teaching children could begin a transformation in the lives of children that could be compared to conversion. True repentance and conversion were hailed as the life-lasting change. A life-lasting change would be the long-term test of the project. Immediately we are hoping to see children who are excited about hearing from God, who are comfortable in hearing from God and who are speaking what they hear and praying for others, especially their peers.

Becky Fischer and Jennifer Toledo both bear witness to seeing change in the personal spiritual journey of children who are taught the supernatural power of God in their lives today. Both are advocates for the idea that children can minister effectively in the kingdom when they are prepared.

In a You-Tube video from Bethel Church, Seth Dahl, the children's pastor, gave information about their curriculum that leads children into an encounter with God. They want children to develop healthy lifestyles and relationships. Their mission is to have the children experience the presence of God by investing a considerable amount of time each week in worship, sharing and hearing testimonies, and learning to consistently pay attention to what the Lord is doing around them. This is also a resource for teaching children to pray as they hear from God.

In another video from Bethel church, "Children's Ministry: Surviving or Thriving?" Seth Dahl gave important information relative to the thought of this project:

As the human population rapidly grows worldwide, there is an increasing number of children to a decreasing proportion of adults; the only way to keep up with the worldwide boom of children is to equip other children to reach them. Jesus said, 'He has hidden those things from the wise and learned and given them to little children.' Think smaller."<sup>34</sup>

This is very significant to the project of teaching children to hear God and to pray for others. Children are needed to minister to their own. Today's generation of children face difficulties that were once classified as adult issues. At this time children are battling incest, abuse, neglect, abandonment, incarceration, drugs, homelessness, sex trafficking, poor health, as well as many parents who do not desire to teach their children about God. Some children are merely surviving. Hearing the voice of God through their peers could be lifesaving.

There is more for children and now is always the time. Jesus has come and said, "The kingdom of God is among you" (Luke 17:21). Making that statement relevant for

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<sup>34</sup> Seth Dahl, "Children's Ministry Surviving or Thriving," YouTube Video, accessed December 12, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uHD7vYPAO> PM.

today, the kingdom is among us today. Teaching children to encounter the presence of God in their lives now, by hearing his voice, is vital. Teaching children to pray for other children is vital now. Children are learning daily. So as they soak in life, using all their normal senses, why not soak in them in the supernatural power of God and make them fit for the master's use?

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **PROJECT ANALYSIS**

#### **Introduction**

This work has progressively shown God's confidence in the ministry of children. God has always been ready to interact with all believers. He likes the crown of His creation. The research in this study has disclosed an unfortunate paradigm held in tension about the Holy Spirit speaking to and through children; is it real or unreal? The church has waxed and waned on the issue of how to see children in ministry in the church. It is agreed children should be taught the wonderful things of God, but what happens if they manifest the power of the Holy Spirit? The church continues to grapple with the capability of children to experience God. How much Holy Spirit should a child have? Can you give them too much before a certain age? These are age-old questions, with answers that change with the era, or the movement.

To reflect on my own teachings that led to this document, I was raised by Christian parents and relatives who believed the Word of God was true. I was taught to pray the Lord's Prayer, memorize the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm, the Beatitudes and the Ten Commandments. I was taught the hymns of the church, to say grace and to know the Bible story characters. I was raised in the church and saw and participated in the fabric of the church. I learned to usher, play the piano, say speeches, bow, sing, read and

fellowship with other believers. I traveled with my late Uncle, establishing storefront churches in Southern Arizona. I learned the protocol and structure of the organized church. In my home my grandmother was an evangelist who often fed the homeless and took clothes to homeless shelters. My sense of the world was, it was good; people were good as God had said, “it was good and very good.” Genesis 1:24 (NKJV). my development in church as a child I cannot judge it as good or bad; it was and it is what it is. It introduced me to God and gave me faith and knowledge of who Jesus was and what he had done for me. As a child, I was baptized and told by my adult teachers, “You are now a new Person.” I learned children’s songs, memorized Scripture, learned how to lead, learned caring and sharing and all these things believed to be necessary and good by my parents and the church. My mother passed on a very solid work ethic, maintained still this day. This background led me to the altar to accept Christ at age eight. My development in the church was based on my talents and gifts serving God in the church. My Bible training was Sunday school. What I knew of the Holy Spirit was the incident of Nicodemus and Jesus, and the day of Pentecost. During Revival time, there was a lot of shouting, crying, dancing and singing; this for me was the sign of the presence of the Holy Spirit. All of this was good, yet my teaching and understanding as a child on things of the Spirit were minimal at best.

Today, after years of working in church and children’s ministry, I find myself following the traditional patterns for training children. I invite children to accept Christ into their hearts, make a confession and then receive water baptism. Next, I proceeded to teach the Scriptures, preach children’s sermons, songs and use the full gamut of Christian market stuff to teach our children about God and Jesus. Technology improved

curriculum and curriculum became colorful, exciting and interactive. In spite of all this positive change we find we are somehow losing children by the “tween” years ages eleven and twelve. Many children by their teen years have lost interest or find no connection or relevance in the Church. Children’s wonderful, amazing abilities, school, athletics, science, music, reading may not always be attributed to God given talents. This may lead to children who are never told to “lift Holy Hands” to acknowledge all things come from God. Children are led to see secular education, trends, fame, lights camera, action, social status, cars, peer acceptance, busy life schedules, and their God consciousness is put on the back burner for what looks like the great life.

Becky Fischer, founded Kids in Ministry International (KIMI) in 2001. KIMI is a multifaceted ministry that trains children and adults to walk in the supernatural power of God. Becky Fischer says, “Christianity as we live it, and God as we have portrayed Him seems to be quite irrelevant to many in this generation as they mature into their teens and beyond. Jesus in many ways is in the same category as Santa and the Easter Bunny... Jesus is just the man in the stories.”<sup>1</sup> Kraig Murray, Education Consultant and Bible Teacher, says “the church has not bridged the gap between Sunday and Monday.”<sup>2</sup> I think these are true reflective statements and are relevant for both adults and children. What did the church miss in sharing Christ in early childhood? Even with those children involved in the programs, how did we not hold them to the faith of the church?

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<sup>1</sup> Becky Fischer. *Redefining Children’s Ministry in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Mandan, ND: Kids in Ministry International, 2008), 23.

<sup>2</sup> Rev. Kraig T. Murray. Context Associate Meeting, Ministry Consultant, Atlanta, Georgia, December 15, 2015.



The DMin process with the help of the focus group, isolated statements made earlier in this study that children matter to God. If I make this statement then what has God envisioned as the ministry to children? Is there more than just God's command to minister to them? Is there also God's command to see children as God views them? Is the church paradigm in need of a shift, to align itself to see children in God's view having strength and perfect praise?

This DMin study presents some evidence that children are capable and desire to experience God. The study also realizes that there is often a concern, the age-old tension, from parents and pastors that children hearing God will be too much and unhealthy. Author Esther Ilnisky says, "Frankly, I too get nervous if I think too much about it. However, I had to concede to the Holy Spirit. The deeper they go, the happier they get, and as the Spirit leads, the better they cope in their everyday lives."<sup>3</sup> I believe children are hungry for more of the Word. Like adults, children need more and must receive more. Fischer says, "Conventional thinking in regards to children is that as long as a person is a child they can only handle the milk of the Word."<sup>4</sup> I say our traditional ministry to children has not produced a bold, confident believer who helps to represent the kingdom of God in the earth. Children are a part of the body of Christ; if this is true then the whole body must be prepared and equipped for the work. Becky Fischer says, "Children should be at the top of the list of potential trainees because they are so teachable and open to new ideas."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Esther Ilnisky, *Let the Children Pray*. (West Palm Beach, FL: Children's Global Prayer Movement, 2012), 68.

<sup>4</sup> Fischer, *Redefining*, 34.

<sup>5</sup> Fischer, *Redefining*, 60.

Our training is great but not adequate when children only participate in the practical helping roles of the church. Can the children hear the voice of God? Again, Becky Fischer says it's necessary to actually demonstrate how things are done. "It's not enough to tell children they can hear God's voice. They need to be trained what to hear and shown how to listen. It's not enough to tell them Jesus can heal the sick. They need to be shown how to lay hands on the sick themselves."<sup>6</sup> In my project, I want to teach children to hear and experience God and to have a greater understanding of biblical stories by seeing the workings of the Holy Spirit with wonder and awe. I would want children to move out into ministry because of experiencing God.

### **Challenge for the Context**

My context, Ray of Hope Children's Ministry, was the perfect place to ask this question, "How do we change our teaching to impartation that will introduce children to a real Jesus and to the Holy Spirit who lives and works in them?"<sup>7</sup> The context, through the project, would be challenged to develop children's ministry which would engage teaching the church and parents to see and put into practice the belief that every child that is a believer is equipped with the gifts of the Holy Spirit! Not only are children equipped by the Holy Spirit, but they can operate with their gift. He is the power that lives within the child to seal them and deliver them to the Father. The Holy Spirit is the living Spirit of God with us. Can the church body and parents help shape the spiritual lives of children? Our ministry expectations would be challenged to move from just memorizing the

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<sup>6</sup> Fischer, *Redefining*, 54.

<sup>7</sup> Writers quote

Scripture and learning speeches. The church and parents are challenged to honor the holiness and untapped spiritual voice of children. Children's church can make much needed progress by understanding and encouraging children to pray for one another the prayer of faith. It is vital to spiritual growth that children are taught to lay hands and pray for the sick, making it normal to believe in the supernatural power of prayer. It is imperative to teach children that the supernatural aspect of nature that is visible to all of us was all created supernaturally. God spoke it all into existence and it's all still here! Now that is truly awesome! It sounds like too much, yet the world system thrives on investing in movies that have every element of the supernatural literally jumping off the screen and it is never too much. Every witch, warlock, spell and incantation; every Princess, every frog is magical and as designed children and parents have drawn. Children watch witches cast spells and try to imitate them; children are led to believe all of this is great fun. If the church noticed, all of this is supernatural behavior being displayed to children as being the norm. Billions of dollars are invested by the world to draw the minds of children at an early critical age. Marketing and jingles that repeat again and again seep into the mind endlessly through TV, videos, games, iPods and phones. Children are exposed to pornography by the age of eight through some electronic device; and those children exposed to TV watch commercials that are today called "soft porn." We, the Christian community, have attempted some things to try and draw children into the Kingdom. There are new children Christian games, such as Veggie Tales and Christian children's songs, games, charts and crafts but often on a much smaller budget. All in all, very little written children's material addresses the power of the Almighty,

supernatural God. Our concerns about teaching too much spiritual “stuff” keeps our teaching focused on being exciting and fun, but with limited experience with God.

It is easy for a child to understand teaching about a supernatural God. Recently while reading the record of the birth of Christ from Luke 2 with a group of children (ages six-nine), we paused in the story as I asked the children to retell in their own words the few verses that were shared. One child was very fascinated with the angel who appeared to Mary. After some discussion, someone suggested the angel was big, because the angel said “Fear Not”. I asked if anyone would be frightened if an angel appeared in our classroom door that was bright and very large; if anyone would run, hide, scream or jump. To my amazement only the older children, nine and ten-year-old’s, said they would hide. The younger children all said, “they would look at the angel and want to talk to him about God.” They are not afraid of something supernatural, they have not been repressed and hindered, and they want to receive! Every record in the Bible has elements of the supernatural power of God, from the Genesis creation story to Revelation’s heaven and return of Christ. The body of biblical work presses forward and declares the wondrous works of our God.

It is critical that the project set the stage for children to hear God and know that it is the Lord. The project would create a safe place for children to experience the touch, voice, power of the living Savior. Children who are taught to see the supernatural power of God as they are maturing in Christ will truly learn to walk their witness, speak and practice the things of God in the earth. Just as we physically grow, so we should grow spiritually. Spiritual growth is not limited to adults only; children, too, are a part of the body of Christ with rights and privileges.

During the project, I saw a shift in the paradigm of children ministry. The normal teaching method or formula for how to pray shifted to ministry that has exposed children to prayer and praying under the anointing. The children were taught to listen first to hear the voice of God and then pray, “what thus said the Lord.” The supernatural power of God was manifested in the children. The project has helped to bring this understanding of how God speaks. In my years of ministry to children, I have had children tell me other children wait for them to say something first because what they say is going to happen. Author Becky Fischer says, “If we want to teach in such a way to have the most results and cause them to love learning about spiritual things, then observing and doing is critical.”<sup>8</sup>

How powerful the kingdom becomes as we strengthen the knowledge and experience of children with the Holy Spirit. The context church is currently praying for fearlessness in going after the lost. Children must be a part of this prayer command. The church must witness children who will pray for souls that are lost, children that will pray for their friend to be healed and believe that God can do what He said.

The DMin program recommended readings from the Supernatural Ministry focus group Mentor increased my knowledge and exposure to children ministering in power and knowledge. My program studies revealed to me there are many children’s pastors who have believed God for more in their children’s ministries and challenged me to believe that greater was possible in my context as minister of a children’s church. Many questions were raised for me as the doctoral process evolved, thoughts about what I had taught children about the supernatural. Jesus in the New Testament is God with us, who

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<sup>8</sup> Fischer. *Redefining*, 76.

walked the earth and spoke to us, but He also communicated with His Father. The children knew this information, but did they know Jesus was a man talking to God, was our supernatural example? Children knew the story of Paul being called by Jesus, but what picture did their imagination paint of those stories? Were they supernatural or just another Bible story? The art of an excellent story teller helps children quickly believe the story, but what about God still speaking today as he spoke in the Bible? What about the presence of God for their lives today? The power of God is still real today, the Bible story must tell an active powerful story. If children were taught that they could hear from God to pray, would they obey and pray for their peers? Desirable long-term benefits would be the development of children with transformed lives. By directly experiencing and manifesting the Spirit of God the children would develop a relational connection to God.

Following the Theoretical Foundations paper, the design for this project was to explore if teaching about the Holy Spirit and prayer and hearing God would excite, delight and lead children to want to hear God and pray for their peers. In this context, would parents be interested in their children learning to pray and expect to hear from God? In this context, I wanted to explore if young children can understand and respond to the supernatural indwelling of the Holy Spirit in them and working through them, leading them to pray for others.

The project design provided settings for children who participated to implement what they learned through altar calls during Children's Church worship service. This would be a way to see if a change in behavior in the children's willingness to operate in sharing through prayer and witnessing. The project learned the effects of what an

intensive teaching, modeling, listening, believing and practicing encounter will do to strengthen children on their spiritual journey.

### **Methodology**

The theme was the ministry of children. The biblical foundations information supported the thought of children having an innate ability to hear from God. Our research and exegesis of Psalm 8:1-2 supported the thought that children mattered to God and have a place of importance in the work of the kingdom. God revealed to the Psalmist that children were His “bulwark” against His enemy. God revealed that the gurgling sound of an infant could give God glory and still the enemy. The Psalmist could see the majestic God revealed in the heavens, and out of the mouth of children and infants.

The project method for gathering data included the following: pre-and post-surveys for children and parents, participant teaching sessions, enrichment activity, journaling, audio interviews, verbal statements and context associate observations. Data was gathered from observation of session participation, prayer altar calls and observation of behaviors. The qualitative approach of research sought to find information from people through their experiences. This approach fit for use with these children who are verbally and physically expressive about their experiences. This type of research is holistic in nature and allowed interpretation of data from responses, actions, as well as the written. The group was small and contained in a space conducive to observation and stationary audio equipment.

The first step in the project method was learning. This step of the project involved the researcher selecting lessons and materials and studying them thoroughly to present to the Context and Professional associates. In July of 2017, books, and videos were purchased that were needed for the project. The first step brought some apprehension for the researcher. This is a radical idea for the Disciples of Christ and although I had their context support, there would be questions. I needed to know how these curriculums worked. Could I use all of the ideas, or would I need to tailor lessons to this environment? To increase my knowledge, I watched videos of the ministry of Becky Fischer, Mike Seth, Jennifer Toledo and Heidi Baker, all powerful children teachers and preachers.

Armed with books and videos I met with the Context and Professional Associates to present the idea of the project on August 16<sup>th</sup> and September 6<sup>th</sup> after Intensive V. We began by confirming and redefining the hypothesis; if children were nurtured in learning to hear from God they would experience his voice and if led would pray for their peers, thereby helping to equip the body of Christ. In the two meetings with Associates and Children's Church teacher's questions and discussion about the children lifting their hands, crying or even speaking in tongues suggested an old familiar concern of too much spiritual teaching for children. This tension around children, the Holy Spirit and prayer was discussed in the Historical Foundations chapter. It was helpful to use information from the Biblical Foundations chapter and the Historical Foundations chapter to present children's involvement with God's supernatural power to the group. This information helped to solidify that the project would be a blessing. I convinced the group that the wise Holy Spirit is careful and would be with us in every session.



After meeting with Context Associates and Children's Church teachers, the project was a go with some stipulations: (1) If a child was becoming uncomfortable he/she could leave at any time, (2) parents could sit in on lessons, and (3) I would have a teacher or minister in the sessions. I agreed, knowing these were reasonable requests, and they would help to keep the sessions focused, and they would and provide me with a witness to the project.

It was agreed that I would present the lessons, and one of the teachers or a Context Associate would present the activity. Both of us would assist children with journaling. Each session would begin and end with music and guided prayer. Guided prayer meant I would ask the children to pray about the concept of the lesson. For example, in the lesson on the "Word is a lamp unto my feet," pray the Scripture and thank God for his Word.

The next step was the development of pre-and post-surveys. The pre-and post-survey questions were developed by a Professional Associate and myself in June with revisions made in September. It was recommended from my peer group during Intensive V to research Dr. Lynn Underwood's survey who had many studies on investigating spiritual experiences. I was able to find at this site a Daily Spiritual Experience Scale<sup>9</sup> that could be reshaped for children. My project would now include an additional survey with data to give validity to the project (See Appendix C).

After contacting the author for permission, the document was slightly modified by color coding the columns to accommodate younger children with reading concerns. I

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<sup>9</sup> Lynn Underwood, "Daily Spiritual Experience Scale," accessed September 16, 2017, <http://www.dsesc.org>.

researched the website of Lynn Underwood, who is well noted for her book, *Spiritual Connection in Daily Life: Sixteen Little Questions That Can Make a Big Difference*,<sup>10</sup> She introduces sixteen simple questions that invite us to become more aware of experiences such as deep peace, joy, a sense of inner strength and giving and receiving love. The questions from Underwood's Daily Spiritual Experience Scale, have been used in hundreds of studies and projects, translated into forty languages, and used for years by counselors, therapists, nurses, clergy, and social workers. *Spiritual Connection in Daily Life* offers a step-by-step guide to using these questions to cultivate richer, deeper and more satisfying lives. People with many different kinds of spiritual beliefs will also find a common language for communicating with others about the role of the "more than" in their lives.<sup>11</sup>

Next my project selected ten children between the ages of seven and eleven, who serve as deacons or are being trained to serve for the Ray of Hope Children's Church ministry. These children were selected because of their commitment and their parent's commitment to learning more about the things of God. These children will represent the children's ministry population; two children are foster children; one child is from a single/ deaf parent home; two children are adopted; three are from single parent homes; and two children are from homes with both parents. These children were involved in six sessions of teaching using Becky Fischer's *Hearing God's Voice (for Kids) Children's*

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<sup>10</sup> Lynn Underwood, *Spiritual Connections in Daily Life: Sixteen Little Questions That Can Make a Big Difference*, accessed September 18, 2017, <http://www.lynnunderwood.com>.

<sup>11</sup> Lynn Underwood, "About Lynn Underwood," accessed September 18, 2017, <http://www.lynnunderwood.com>.

*Church Curriculum for Ages 6-12*,<sup>12</sup> and Jennifer Toledo's *Eyes That See and Ears That Hear*<sup>13</sup> materials and implementation activities.

Each family was given permission forms (adults and child). Parents were asked to participate in a pre-survey-audio interview one week before the first session. Phone interviews fulfilled the audio-component for parents who could not do a face-to-face in Children's Church.

Parent Pre-Survey interview questions:

1. Have you ever had an occasion when you knew God was speaking to you?
2. Were you able to receive it, and how did you respond?
3. Has your child ever said anything to you that seemed unusual or profound that you might attribute to the working of the Holy Spirit?
4. Do you think your child can hear from God?
5. Are you willing to allow your child to learn to listen to the voice of God and respond?

The child pre-survey and permission forms to participate were emailed, with their return requested, at the beginning of the first session.

A conference call was held with all Professional Associates and Context Associates to confirm session dates, lessons and input from anyone. A Context Associate designed and produced the Journal, which was ready for the first session. The parent

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<sup>12</sup> Becky Fisher, *Hearing God's Voice (for Kid) Children's Church Curriculum for Ages 6-12*, accessed Jan. 15, 2016, <http://jet.com/product/detail/bf099e12527426ca8f3dcf>.

<sup>13</sup> Jennifer Toledo, *Eyes That See and Ears That Hear, A Parent's Guide to Teaching Their Children How to Hear the Voice of God*. (Dinuba, CA: Global Children's Movement, 2007).

introductory meeting was held September 9<sup>th</sup>, as scheduled, with hand-outs, journals, lesson plans and topics. The parents watched fifteen minutes of a video from Aldersgate Renewal Ministries, *Methodist School for Supernatural Ministry: Session Four: "The Rest"* with Children's Pastor, Mike Seth. Those parents in attendance were in favor of the teaching and were happy their children were participants.

I chose this format of teaching, using hands-on enrichment activities and journaling because of my knowledge of this particular group of children and parents. I believed this would provide clear information and incorporate several different learning styles to help introduce all participants to the concept of the Holy Spirit speaking to children. This would be a paradigm shift for parents to perhaps see their children as spiritual beings capable of hearing from God. Hearing about God speaking is familiar to both children and parents, but the concept of an intentional teaching to hear from the Spirit will be foreign. It was important to teach the lessons in self-confidence and the aid of the Holy Spirit because of the desired hypothesis result: to have children actively implement the lessons by praying for each other. This qualitative approach focuses on observation of behavior during teaching, experience and many open-ended inquiries. Hands-on activities to provide experiences enhanced the teaching. The presence of another teacher to watch and record events proved extremely valuable to this project.

These activities were all interactive and allowed the children to be involved in the concept they were just taught. Some of the activities involved having a partner. This helped the children to share with one another while learning. Journaling was a reflective activity. For those children that like to write, they could recall what they may have experienced. What did they think of today's session? Did they hear God's voice? Some

of the children during this time would talk to a Context Associate, or the researcher, about different experiences during their day where they thought God spoke to their Spirit (See Appendix E “Voices of the Children”).

### **Implementation**

To help the children in Children’s Church understand the idea of their peers hearing from God and praying for them, as Pastor I would begin by ministering an interactive informational message about hearing God and prayer. This would allow these children to ask questions or share their thoughts about hearing the Holy Spirit and how they believe people respond to His voice. The message would contain examples of persons hearing from God, (i.e., Old Testament prophet Samuel, and New Testament Ananias, praying for Paul). The aim of the interactive message would be to stir up the children’s interest in having their friends praying for them. As the children’s pastor I let the children act out what it might be like to have someone pray for you, and how that might feel. It is believed that this preparation helped the children during the implementation of the project.

Our project officially began September 10<sup>th</sup> as scheduled, with the sermon in Children’s Church entitled “Hearing God Speak.” Several stories were presented as planned. The Genesis account of God speaking to Noah; 1Samuel’s account of God calling young Samuel; Solomon praying for God to speak to Him for he was a young King; and the New Testament account of God speaking to Saul. Each class was able to demonstrate how they pictured each incident. At the end of each short skit, two questions were asked; Was there a change in the person after they heard the voice of God? Did God

give them something to do? Several children from the audience brought in information that they heard grandparents say things like, “the Lord told me,” and they believed their grandparent could hear God speaking. These interjections helped the message to confirm that God speaks. At the end of the message, I introduced children’s church to the Children’s Prayer Group (CPG), trainees, and explained they were going to be involved in six classes learning about and practicing hearing from God. It was explained to the children’s church kids that after the Children’s Prayer Group completed their class they would pray for children’s church kids. I was surprised at the number of children who wanted to become a part of the group. I was asked to do another group when this group finished. The message and idea were well received by the teachers and children of Ray of Hope children’s ministry. The CPG sessions began September 14, 2017. The original plan was for one session per week, but due to erratic attendance at the beginning, and to keep everyone receiving the same lesson for several weeks, it became necessary to meet twice a week. Each family was given permission forms (adults and child).

The original plan was to train ten children’s deacons who ranged from age nine to twelve. This did not work out as some of the children’s deacons were unable to participate, were not interested or aged out moving to the youth ministry prior to the start of the project. As a result of the introductory sermon I was able to recruit other members of children’s church to participate. The final age range for project participants was seven to twelve. Four of the children were deacons, three served in the children’s choir, two were a part of the children’s dance ministry and one children’s church regular age seven who was autistic. The group was eclectic and diverse. The younger children were starting to read and write and the autistic child could only write his name and read very slowly

with assistance. Flexibility was the success of the sessions. By being alert and in combining several teaching styles, activities and interactive games I was able to keep the learning applicable for all of the children. The autistic child seemed to come alive when the word Ruach was introduced. The examples of sound and wind with the pronouncement of the word, fascinated the young children and the little autistic boy, who began to respond to every question or comment with “Ruach” His mother reported that throughout the project he would tell her to call on “Ruach” for help.

### *Lesson One: I’m a Spiritual Being*

This lesson, Natural-vs-Supernatural comes from a two-part series called School of the Holy Spirit, by Becky Fischer. The first lesson of the series, “I’m a Spiritual Being” centered on “God is a Spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.” John 4:24 (KJV). The following quote comes from Becky Fischer’s Lesson One of that series. (See more information from this lesson in Chapter Four Theoretical Foundations).

#### Teaching:

When God made us, He gave us a “suit” so we could live and function well on planet earth. We call this suit our “body.” If we did not have bodies of flesh and blood, we could not live on this earth the way God wanted us to. He gave us bodies which can see, smell, hear, taste, and touch the world around us. We call this world the “natural” world. (*Hold the baby doll in your arms like you would a real baby and point to it as you talk.*) The minute babies are born they begin learning about the natural world around them. They immediately begin to use their five physical senses to learn how to operate in this world. But the real baby, or person, cannot be seen with our natural eyes. The real person is down on the inside of this little body. The body is just the “house” the real person lives in. How do we know this is true? Let’s go back to the Garden of Eden and think about how God created people.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Becky Fischer, “School of the Holy Spirit Series,” *Kids Ministry International Inc.*, accessed June 12, 2017, <http://kidsinministry.org/about/becky-fischer/>.

This first lesson introduced the children to God as a Spirit who is not far in the heavens, but God who lives in you. In this lesson the Hebrew word “Ruach.” The children loved the Hebrew word for wind. Balloons were used in the activity to have fun with the life of the balloon before and after it has air.

These questions led the children into deeper thoughts; Do “we” people today still have His Spirit and, where could He be? What might we call God’s Spirit? The class reflected on the Holy Spirit and his living in us today and wrote in their journals. The children and parents were asked to read 2 King 6:8-32, the story of Gehazi and Elisha the Prophet. The assignment was to encourage parents and children to interact with a story that demonstrated the natural and the spiritual. This also is a way of keeping the lessons connected and the starting place for the next lesson. This lesson closed with prayer for God to make himself known to each child during this project and to open their hearts to receive His voice.

### *Lesson Two: Two Kingdoms*

#### Teaching:

God has a Kingdom! Did you know God has a kingdom? Over one hundred and fifty times the Bible talks about the kingdom of God. Jesus talked about the kingdom of God constantly. When He healed someone He would say, “the kingdom of heaven has come to you.” He told us to seek first the kingdom of God and blessings would be added to us (Matthew 6:33). He told people to repent and turn from their sins because the kingdom of heaven was coming near to them (Matthew 3:2). He said unless we’re born again we can’t enter the kingdom (John 3:5). He told us to pray, “Our Father who art in heaven, holy is your name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven (Luke 11:2).” Jesus was always talking about the kingdom, so it must be important. We’re going to spend some time learning about the kingdom of God.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Fischer, *Kids Ministry Inc.* 17-21.



To connect lessons one and two, after song and quiet time CPR was asked to invite and listen for the Holy Spirit during our session. We began with a role play of 2 Kings 6:8-32. This then led to our second lesson on two Kingdoms. Just as we had studied the natural and the supernatural, we wanted to learn about the names of these two worlds. These two worlds are labeled by one of their important characteristics, light and darkness.

It was necessary with this lesson to have several examples. One scenario involved turning off the lights for 2-3 minutes. The children later talked about how that felt; scary for most and some had nervous laughter. While the lights were out the children were asked to move to a table in the room that was red. With the lights out, the children could not find the red table. Some did not try and just stayed seated, and those that tried were walking into chairs and other objects. Once the lights were on, the children seemed to breathe a sigh of relief. One child expressed fear of the darkness and said she prayed and just kept quiet. Some of the children who had attempted to walk in the darkness saw that they were originally at the red table. This experience yielded much discussion about what we as believers call the Kingdom of Darkness. What or who might live in the kingdom of Darkness? The children enjoyed the exercise with the lights on and were instructed to, eat a cookie, hug your friend and find a chair with # 2 on the back. It was agreed Light was good. Good became our class buzz word for lights on. God is Good and God is Love. His Kingdom is Light. "God is Light and in Him there is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5). "God has wrapped Himself in light" (Psalm 104:2). There is no darkness in the kingdom of Heaven! This session closed with a praise song, lifting their hands and thanking God for light in their life. This week's assignment was to write in their journal anything that

they experienced during the session or that they saw during the week that they could list in the kingdom of light or kingdom of darkness.

### *Lesson 3: Citizenship in the Kingdom*

This lesson was taught by Context Associate, Rev. Kraig Murray, who is a Black History buff. The children were treated to authentic artifacts from a young woman from Alabama who had to meet certain criteria to vote. He had the registration booklet with her signature from the court house. He also had several newspaper articles and pictures of her attempting to vote. He had a ticket signed with bus number and seat for the 1965 March on Washington for voting rights. This is what citizens of a country can do. They have a right to have a voice and be heard. Rev. Murray taught on being a citizen of the kingdom of Light and in our Kingdom, we have a King. He shared Scripture on Jesus being called King, and how people become a part of the kingdom by believing and confessing Him. It was the perfect time to remind the children that they had experienced hearing God's voice when they accepted Christ and make a confession of Faith. The lesson imparted the thought that they already had heard the voice of God, and possibly have heard His voice today. He and the children did an impromptu play using the story of Samuel's call. Following the impromptu play each child was asked if he/she had accepted Jesus as their personal Savior. To close this session each child's name was called and each was given a Kingdom Kid citizenship Card (See Appendix D).

This session ended with the children praying for one another and asking God to help their friends to hear His voice. With soft music playing and the evidence of the presence of the Spirit, the children took each other's hands. Rev. Murray began talking

about the voice of God sometimes being soft, sometimes loud, sometimes through another person. This night the children really seemed to want the experience of knowing they heard the voice of God. They were asked to pray for any member of the group, if the member requested. The children were timid about asking each other for prayer, but they stayed with the assignment and were still praying when parents arrived. The parents were asked to assist with their child's assignment to write in their journals about tonight's lesson.

#### *Lesson Four: Hearing God for Direction*

From Jennifer Toledo, *Eyes That See and Ears That Hear, A Parent's Guide to Teaching Their Children to Hear the Voice of God*. Parents were given information on where to purchase this book if they were interested in continuing with these lessons.

Jennifer Toledo's lesson started with encouragement:

It's comforting to know that God made each one of us perfectly so that we could all hear Him and have real friendship with Him. We lack nothing! Even if you were born without natural ears, God has perfectly made you with spiritual ears to hear. Each of us were built with all the tools we need to experience God; we just need to learn how to use the tools. <sup>16</sup>

This lesson highlights the Scripture Psalms 119:105, Jesus as our friend, and the Holy Spirit as our leader because He has spoken to God who has the plan. God knows our need and secrets. Worrying about what to do is hopeless. We can go to God and ask for advice and he will give us good advice. Remember, God likes to talk and wants to talk to you. Jennifer Toledo says, "When God speaks, His words are like a giant flash light that shines onto our dark path and makes it easy for us to see where we are supposed to go ...

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<sup>16</sup> Toledo, *Eyes*, 9.

We can always trust His guidance, too, because his plans for us are perfect and good.” In this lesson the idea of three voices was introduced. The role play involved three children; one was the voice of God, another the voice of the enemy, and the other yourself. I made two columns on the board and the group and I took time to brainstorm things that God might say and the enemy or yourself might say before this role play.

This week’s activity I called “Word Walk.” I gave each child a small flashlight (His Word is a light) and asked them to walk only on the Bibles that had been placed on the floor, under tables, in a corner and a few in chairs. Some of the Bibles were open to verses such as Proverbs 3:5-6. Trust in the Lord, I can do all things through Christ, (Phil. 4:13). This activity revealed how quickly we get off the path. Children attempted to manipulate the path when the Bible path went under a table causing them to have to get on their knees to stay on the path. Two of the children called their friends to help them move the table over or tried to move the Bibles. In the areas that were a bit dark and the Bible was open, the children forgot they had a flashlight. I watched and occasionally said, “this is God’s plan for you. How will you walk it out?” One child became completely confused which led to her getting angry because the Bible was on the chair. She would not step up on the chair and could not move the Bible. She came to a standstill which also held-up those behind her. There were children who went around her and told her to move so they could step up onto the chair. Others attempted to talk to her about the step, and some said they would help. She finally accepted help, but never let go of the three children that had assisted her with this step. Reflections on this event were powerful. The children saw fear stop a person in their walk of life. Parents saw the anger and frustration of their child not knowing what to do. It was interesting that no one in this situation

thought to prayer with the child. This interaction was a powerfully organic and revealing activity.

This was a phenomenal activity. Parents, children and context associates all were reflective on how each child tried to walk the Bible Walk. To close class the children prayed for each other. They were instructed to ask God about trusting Him as they learned to follow His direction. The children paired off to follow instructions and prayed for one another to trust God for His good plan for their life.

Parents were given Judges chapters six and seven, the story of Gideon, to help children see all the ways that God gave Gideon clear directions. Or parents could use the story of Saul's Damascus Road experience and children could write or draw a picture story of all the directions that were given to Paul, Ananias and others in this story.

#### *Lesson Five: Hearing God for Others:*

The group began with prayer for the presence of God to be with us and speak to us was led by several children who wanted to pray. This writer was excited that the children were arriving wanting to pray. They now seemed comfortable with the quiet moments before each session. I found that parents were comfortable with the materials and the method of teaching. Most dropped their children off and some stayed for a while because they were learning with the children. This lesson, again from Jennifer Toledo says, "Hearing God for others is no different than how we hear God for ourselves. Instead of asking about yourself, you ask about someone else. God loves to share secrets with us about other people that He loves. Sometimes, it's just so we can pray for them, and other

times it is so we can encourage them by telling them what we're hearing."<sup>17</sup> Toledo refers to hearing for others as prophecy. This request in our prayer, according to Toledo, is to ask God to help us to see others as He sees them.

The children were asked to describe a bully. What does a bully look like? Then to ask God to help you see how He sees the bully? Jennifer says, "God's perspective is always full of love. So, when we prophesy, we are growing in love for those around us."<sup>18</sup> It was necessary to explain and discuss this word "prophecy." Some children thought prophecy was like a fortune teller, or the wizard Harry Potter or a witch that could find out where you were going or what you are doing. There were questions about people that were called prophets. Most of the children felt their parents were negative about prophets unless you were talking about someone in the Bible. These comments were unexpected and I confirmed and reminded them of what we know about God. His plans are good for us and that there are two kingdoms: light and darkness. How could we compare the words of a witch, or Harry Potter with words from others who say they speak prophecy? We made two columns on the board and wrote what might be spoken by God or what could be spoken by something else.

The children also brought up questions about demons talking, and about nightmares. Were these dreams talking? This writer listened and decided to let God answer because this was the Hearing from God group and these conversations organically happened and were not a part of the designed session. I suggested to the group that we sit quietly and ask God the Holy Spirit to speak to us, about demons talking and

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<sup>17</sup> Toledo, *Eyes*, 38.

<sup>18</sup> Toledo, *Eyes*, 37.

nightmares. If they heard God say something they should speak out right away. An eleven-year-old boy said, “God said the demons can talk” and he brought up the story of Jesus delivering a man from demons in the Bible where the demons talked. A seven-year-old said “the devil talked to Eve in the Garden.” It was agreed that demons can talk and that they live in the spirit-world and can come in our dreams and cause fear. Fear was not from God. Our lesson taught that God, speaking to you for others, would be words that have these three things: strength, encouragement and comfort.

Toledo says,

As you are asking God about someone, if you hear something negative like, “He is really afraid and is always in fear,” don’t speak that out because it is not going to encourage him. Instead, speak out the solution, God wants to give you peace in your heart; He wants you to know that he is in control and can be trusted.<sup>19</sup>

God wants to speak life and children were instructed to know a word from God is positive.

I asked the children at prayer time to partner with someone and ask God to fill them with love and compassion for the person whose hands you are holding, then ask God to show you how he sees this person, and one thing that he loves about your partner. Each child was to ask for the other so that the prayer was exchanged in both directions. Two of the younger children began to cry. Their partners waited for them to stop crying. The child being prayed for said she was afraid God might say something bad. I told to listen and assured her God loved her and he would speak kindly. Finally, the crying child prayed for her partner, telling her God loved her and that she is very important to him; then both girls were in tears. This session was very spirit led and filled with questions and

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<sup>19</sup> Toledo, *Eyes*, 38-39.

openness to understanding things of the Spirit. As the leader, I felt the presence of God's Spirit during this session. I felt wonder as the children had asked such serious questions about demons and nightmares. We closed with a familiar song. Their weekly assignment was to see God in their family and friends, and to share with the friend or family member if God led them to do so.

### *Lesson Six – The Sound of God's Voice*

This lesson focused on the great promise of God to answer when you talk to him. Toledo says, "God is so faithful to us! Just in case we had any doubts that He will speak to us, He decided to give us a really great promise in the Bible. Jeremiah 33:3 says, "Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know. It's a promise!"<sup>20</sup>

The children were reminded in this lesson about all the people we had studied that had talked to God and God answered. They were reminded that they were citizens of the Kingdom of God and the Scripture tells us, "He who belongs to God hears what God says" ... John 8:47.

There was a review of the lessons and conversations about how they felt about hearing God's voice before being a part of the group and now. One of the quiet young boys wasn't sure if he heard the voice of God. He was encouraged by the other students to keep talking to God and He would answer. They were very confident God would speak to him. One child said, "I recognize God's voice because He always said good things." She knew his voice from her voice and that sometimes what her friends said did not

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<sup>20</sup> Toledo, *Eyes*, 10.



match God's voice. The children were given a hand-out from Toledo's book entitled, *How does God Speak?* I was surprised as the children read the list quietly they began to share and point out in agreement that God had spoken to them in one of the ways listed (See Appendix F for the list).

This class was the last of the six sessions. I think the children enjoyed the class but were happy to get back their Saturday mornings. The post-survey and the Daily Spiritual Experience Scale were given to the children at this session. The children were briefed on the four altar calls, coming up, to pray for their peers as a way to see the results of what we had learned and practiced. Although they were hesitant about the altar calls the children agreed to be in attendance and participate. They were instructed that if someone asked for something they didn't understand, they should listen for the voice of God and pray what they heard. Each child was asked to pray for someone in the room they had not partnered with during the sessions. We had not practiced praying for healing so the children were asked to pray for my knee. This prompted one of the children to ask for prayer for his legs. Two children came forward to pray for his legs as they heard from God for him. The Context Associate and some parents wanted the children to pray for them. This was an unexpected practice for the coming Sunday altar calls. The children continued to pray until everyone was signed out. The children were asked to journal about today's session with their parent and return their journals on Sunday.

There was much evidence that the children had responded to the sessions. Their actions from week to week changed as they learned more and practiced the principle of listening and expecting to hear the voice of God. This writer cleaned up from the last session, rejoicing and giving thanks to God for answered prayers for this project.

### **Implementation/Altar Calls**

#### *First Prayer Group Opportunity*

Children's church worship order was rearranged to accommodate the Children's Prayer Group altar prayer (See Appendix B). This Sunday's children's church was well attended. Our numbers were in the nineties, with new parents and children visiting the ministry. At one point I was reluctant to go forward especially with guests who may not understand at all. It was important that as the leader my faith was leading and not fear.

At the scheduled time I asked for the Prayer Group to come forward only to find out they were not in place. As deacons they were actively serving. This little pause almost caused a cancel, but the Spirit helped me and I began to remind the church children of the message a couple of weeks prior about children hearing from God and praying. This pause gave me time to prepare the large group for what was about to happen. In a few minutes eight of the ten children were lined up and ready to try their first altar call. I explained to the classes that their friends had really learned to hear from God and wanted to pray for them. The children were invited to come to any one of the children and give them a prayer request and their friend would pray for them. There was silence, the musician played the wrong song. I asked that they stop and find the song I requested and repeated the invitation to come to the altar. Finally, one teacher stepped forward to the youngest child and knelt asking her for prayer. A child from the third grade came forward and two others from the second grade. Most of the children sat and looked bewildered about all this and could have been uncomfortable. Then something supernatural happened. Another teacher came up and six fifth graders followed. Several

of the first graders and the security guard who stands at our door came up and knelt in front of our eight-year-old prayer team member. Soon everyone had someone to pray for as well as and a person waiting. People were coming and leaving in tears (See Figure 1). All of the CPG were involved in praying for someone. My question about would children pray for their peers if given training had validity. I ended the altar prayer by praying for each of the Children's Prayer Group. The first event was phenomenal. God had shown himself great. Although there was concerns and anxiety from parents of the unexpected, but they trusted God and the researcher. All was well.



Figure 1. Children's Prayer Group Praying for Peers  
(Picture used by signed parental permission)

*Second Prayer Group Opportunity*

The children's dance ministry has twenty-four children ages five to twelve. It was a perfect opportunity for the CPG to pray for others out of a worship setting. All ten children were involved in this opportunity. The children sat and talked to their friends before they prayed. The dance children were open to their friends praying and brought up many different situations for prayer. Again, we had children crying and the CPG responding confidently to their friends. In one situation both the prayer group child and the child being prayed for were in tears. I felt led to pray with them, knowing that the child requesting prayer was very concerned about her father who had just been hospitalized with a severe stroke. I don't know if the eight-year old understood the details of the word "stroke," but she was sensitive to her friend's sadness. The CPG and I reflected on this opportunity. They felt this group was easier than the larger children's church group. The time that was spent talking before praying was good and seemed to help their friends receive the prayer easier. The group prayed for the eight-year old, who still seemed somewhat overwhelmed with emotion from praying. It was explained to the children that there are times that when we pray for others, when we finish we feel tired and drained. This is always a time to ask for other members of the group to pray for them and ask God to restore their strength.

*Third Prayer Group Opportunity*

Just to make the setting different, I asked the Children's Prayer Group for this Altar call to pray first and see if God led them to a certain person, or if God seemed to say anything about a certain person. This was difficult, and only a few of the children stepped forward to pray for others. Finally, some of the congregational children asked if they could come forward.

The altar call proceeded in this manner. Three CPG members did move into the large group to pray for children as they felt led to by the Spirit of God. (See Figure 2. where CPG member kneels to pray for a six-year-old).



Figure 2. Child from Prayer Group kneels to pray for 6-year-old  
(Picture used by signed parental permission)

One of the children from the group shared something she had written about three of her friends. She wrote about some of their talks about their dreams and hopes. While the children were asking her about why she was writing all of this, I asked if they thought this was something we should pray over. They did not understand. I suggested we put our hands on the papers and call out each girl's name and pray for their hopes and dreams. I stepped away and allowed the Children's Prayer Group to talk about my suggestion. They agreed they wanted to pray but weren't sure how or what to say. I read some of the information about each girl and suggested we lay our hand on the writings and ask God what to pray.

As we laid hands on the papers children slowly began to pray the following:

"God, she will be a great nurse. Help her to be kind and give soft shots," Amen.

"God help her to have good grades," Amen.

"God give her money for school, and a scholarship," Amen.

"God give her a friend and something to smile about," Amen.

"God, she is sometimes afraid. Help her to know you are light," Amen.

"God sometime she doesn't like school. Help her to love education," Amen.

God had provided a different type of opportunity for prayer for this group. This was not covered in the sessions and it gave the children an opportunity to experience prayer for someone they did not know and who wasn't present. The children were learning that God speaks and you may have to follow through with actions. The children were given information on how the church prays each year for prayer requests that are written and submitted for New Year's Eve. Today experience was like that; we were praying for the hopes and dreams of their group members' friends. She had felt led to



write these three pages and shared them with us. Reflective questions were: what did this method or type of prayer mean to them? Did they think it was by accident, or that this was a plan of God?

(See Voices of the Children Reflecting and Practicing in Appendix E for responses to these questions).

*One final opportunity: Altar Call*

The setting was children's church. The children attending service were asked to come forward for prayer. The children moved quickly to receive prayer and the CPG prayed fearlessly for both children and adults. A new variable was discussed during prep time and I asked the group to use Scripture in their prayer, or as they talked to children. We recalled our Scripture about, "the Word of God is a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path." the children were asked to use God's word as much as possible, even if they didn't know all of the Scripture. Later, during reflection time, the group felt this was hard, because they were trying to remember a Scripture and hear God at the same time. One child said she kept thinking the "Lord is my Shepherd I shall not want" so she prayed that and asked the child she was praying with to say it with her. Each child's efforts to try were applauded. This would be another teaching session for a group in the future.

### **Observations, Testimonies, Interviews and Surveys**

The hypothesis was if children are given training on hearing God then they would hear and pray of their peers. From the pre-survey, post survey and multiple observations

from a Context Associate who was always present during the sessions and added parent interviews, I received data to validate our project. In order to reduce bias from the first session to the last as well as during the altar prayer opportunities, different teachers were used as observers but the same Context Associate per each session. One of the Professional Associates was available to assist with pre-and post-surveys.

The children began this project shy, uncomfortable and uninformed just talking about hearing God and praying for others. According to interviews with parents and the pre-survey only three of the ten children said they did pray each morning for God to protect their family, or for an exam that day. Only one of the children thought about hearing from God after praying. Nine of the children did not think about hearing God's voice. The children often focused on talking to God about their need request or praying for parent and family. Seven of the children did not have a prayer life, such as praying every morning or evening. Most of the children graced their food or maybe said a prayer if they thought about praying. The idea of God speaking to them was kind of funny, and a little strange. One of the children felt he did feel the presence of God in the mornings. He could not define it. He felt it was a feeling of God. Ten of the ten children all felt prayer was important and they liked to pray since being a part of these sessions. Our survey showed that four of the ten children had not heard God described as a Spirit and were unclear about God's Spirit within them. These were words they have heard, but they had vague thoughts about the meaning. The children related well to the breath of God, breath into Adam, but were not sure about that Spirit today. This concept was relayed using several hands-on experiments and activities such as air in balloons and hands in a glove, showing the difference when an object has breath. From children's reflections and

according to the Daily Spiritual Experience Scale this was an increase from only three children at the beginning of the sessions to seven. Using interviews and journals the children reported feeling thankful to know more about the things of the Spirit, and to learn about the kingdoms of Darkness and Light. The Daily Spiritual Experience Scale showed that four of the children felt they did feel the presence of God and felt good about hearing the voice of God. Only one of the children felt they did not feel the presence of God.

Session four that dealt with God directing our path resulted in several comments like the following: “Why would God direct your path so that you can’t see it?” Another child, “I thought we could do things the way we know how, because I see people do things that I don’t think are God’s directions.” This seemed like an adult subject, but the children were anxious to go deeper and understand God’s direction and our will. It was insightful to hear the children’s thoughts on God having a plan, and what happens if you don’t follow his plan because you don’t know his plan? This session involved some Bible study on God’s love for us and his desire for us to know Him. His will, His Word, His ways, our teachers, parents and God’s voice, the Holy Spirit, are all ways we get to know God’s plan. All these ways plus, our faith and our committed will show us God’s plan. This session I believe increased the children’s desire to want to hear from God. Our post-survey said eight of the children felt good about hearing from God and were not fearful of hearing His voice. The children had learned to feel the love of God and that they wanted a closer relationship with Him. In our hypothesis we wanted to know if this intensive, intentional teaching about hearing and experiencing God would give us a result of children willing to pray for their peers. I believe it did.

The children were given four opportunities to pray for others. In each setting the Children Prayer Group began with some hesitancy but continued. At the end of the opportunities the children discussed how they felt. Eight of the children were comfortable and two of the children felt uncomfortable because they were unsure of what to say. The two children who felt uncomfortable at the first two opportunities felt better with the last two opportunities. The two children who were uncomfortable did better with a small group prayer when the group prayed for the children's dance ministry.

In addition to the responses of the Children's Prayer Group, those children who received prayer responded with tears, and comments that it felt good for their friends to pray for them. According to parent comments and Context Associate interviews with parents, during the sessions the children were interested in talking about hearing God and reported to their parents they liked the sessions. Eight parents reported that their child's prayer life and language had changed. Their children seemed to understand prayer broader than just mom, dad, sister, and brother; and that their prayers were more specific and seemingly thoughtful. Parents reported the children from the Children's Prayer Group showed excitement about praying at home and were proud to show that they knew how to pray. The term *Ruach* was being used in some homes, when the children spoke about feeling God's presence. Many parents believed this was a direct result of the project.

The interviews, comments, reflections and observations, all provided raw, organic data for the project. The project aims of affecting behavior is often difficult to measure. The use of our teaching method with the enhancing activities helped to bring about a visible change in thought that seems to have led to some behavioral changes in the

children about prayer and praying for others. The project did meet some of the expected results. The children showed great excitement for the project and enjoyed our meeting times. Many of the children did not want to miss any sessions. The children received information about the Holy Spirit happily and were open to hearing God speak to them. It was evidenced in the children's journals that they attempted in each exercise to hear God's voice. Some of the children really prayed and listened for God to speak to them. The children's pre-and post-survey displayed an evidence of gained learning about the Holy Spirit. The Daily Spiritual Experience Scale showed that by the end of the six sessions the children were comfortable praying, but now they also felt they needed to first listen to the Spirit before praying. There was evidence by the end of the project of children having an experience with the Spirit of God. They were children hearing from God! (Additional data is presented in Appendix E. Voices of the Children, in the reflections and statements written by the children).

### Summary of Learning

This project proved many of the comments made by Becky Fischer and Jennifer Toledo that children want to learn more about the things of God and they will go deeper in the Spirit if you give guidance. The project also demonstrated that children given instruction about hearing God would respond and pray. Children can worship and can be an instrument in the spiritual move of the church. After the project the Context Associates, Professional Associates and Teachers conferred on what they believed were important factors in this project. The various Associates reflected on the subsequent questions with the following answers:

Question: Did you feel this was an appropriate project for these children?

Context Associate: #1

Yes. This project was a different approach for helping children to learn how to listen to God speaking to them.

Professional Associate: #1:

This was an excellent project to expose the children to God. I value the learning they received because praying for each other really took them into deeper relations with each other. The children learned to see each other differently.

Question: How well was the project presented and was that presentation effective?

Context Associate: #1:

The project was rooted in revealing to kids their ability to embrace the presence of the Holy God in ordinary life. They were taught through conversation and demonstration that they have the ability to communicate with God through the medium of prayer. They were given opportunities to pray for others which allowed them to incarnate the presence of the Holy.

Professional Associate #1:

The materials used and the presentations were appropriately tailored for children in a way that encouraged them to utilize the lessons that were taught.

Professional Associate #2:

The children seem to find their voice. They were not just praying for Mom, Dad, or siblings. Their prayers became deeper.

Context Associate #2:

At first, they seemed to be a little hesitant about what they were doing there. But the next few sessions they were gradually more involved and excited about their time together and what they were learning.

Children Church Teacher #1:

Initially I think the children seemed a little apprehensive about what they were expected to learn from these sessions. But as the sessions progressed and the children began grasp the purpose of these sessions and to put into practice learning to listen to God's voice, it was evident that the children began to really enjoy the results they experienced from putting into practice by listening and praying for others. I think the children learned to pray for other children and liked it.

This researcher believes that the concept of hearing God speak to you was almost strange. Although these children were involved in Church and Church activities, had some knowledge of the Bible and that God spoke to many people in the Bible all the time, but hearing that God wanted to speak to them was like a light bulb being turned on in a bright pink room in which everyone sees each other for the first time!

### **Limitations**

The project faced difficulties with scheduling. Children are dependent on parents for transportation. Parents and children have schedules that are booked solid, making it difficult to fit in time for another involvement. The idea of journals to carry each week didn't work as well as hoped; the children would forget them and misplace them. The journals would have been easier with open ended sentences for the children to complete. It was necessary to complete each lesson during the session and start the next session with reminder questions or trivia. The first lessons seemed to hang in the air and appeared

to be received as would school information. Some of the children and parents forgot to attend the early scheduled sessions so the first two sessions were repeated. Journals were collected at the end of session two, as the Context Associate realized the children were not bringing them back to each session. This changed the order of what we planned to do in the subsequent sessions. At the beginning of each subsequent session during soft music time, we would hand out journals and have the children write about any opportunities they had to hear from God during the week. They were asked to record any prayers that they felt the Spirit lead.

Parents were encouraged to read or do specified activities after the project was complete because some were unable to get involved in the home assignments during the sessions. This researcher believes the audio recordings worked best with this population, again based on their busy schedules. The Daily Spiritual Experience scale was difficult. Some of the children were slow readers and then had to think hard about answers. In order to expedite time, the researcher had to read the Experience Scale and answers even after color coding the answer columns. More time should have been allocated for the last session to collect, fill out any incomplete questions and journaling. This project proved many of the comments made by Becky Fischer and Jennifer Toledo were true about children wanting to learn more about the things of God and that they will go deep in the Spirit if you give guidance. Children can worship and can be an instrument in the spiritual move of the church. The inclusion of hearing God into the Christian curriculum is paramount to raising children to experience God and continue to grow into spiritual champions.



## Conclusion

Esther Ilnisky writes statement that agrees with the thoughts of this study. Ilnisky says,

From a very early age, our children are bombarded with news of frightening real-life atrocities from around the world and with the belief that no one set of moral values is better than any other. Why not encourage children to use the tools God has given Christians to deal with a culture that is far from God? I believe children must learn early to “take it to the Lord in prayer.”<sup>21</sup>

Our world is filled with children under the age of twelve and they face every attack that the enemy can throw. Ilnisky goes on to say, “Today’s children are the most informed generation in history. The profusion of data is staggering. A four-year-old is likely to know more than you did as a teenager.”<sup>22</sup> God has given the church tools to stand in every age against the attacks of the enemy. Children must learn early to hear the voice of God for their generation. Our children are filled, not with a baby Holy Spirit, but with the full Holy Spirit who can help them, comfort them and guide them. As children’s leaders we must remind ourselves that the Holy Spirit works for all who confess belief. We cannot abort teaching our children about the great armor of hearing from God and praying. Ilnisky says, “We rob them and us of answered prayers.”<sup>23</sup> This researcher believes it is desirable and beneficial for our children to have a hearing encounter with God.

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<sup>21</sup> Ilnisky, *Let the Children Pray*, 66.

<sup>22</sup> Ilnisky, *Let the Children Pray*, 70.

<sup>23</sup> Ilnisky, *Let the Children Pray*, 67.

I learned through this project that developing a love for God with all your heart, soul and mind becomes an intricate part of your being when you began to learn to hear His voice. We learn early from our environment through the experience of our natural senses, so why not have early learning and cultivating of our genuine spiritual insights? When a child accepts Christ and is born again, cultivating the Holy Spirit who has quickened them to God is biblical. In the Bible there is often someone praying for someone else after prompting from God. For example, there is Ananias praying for the new convert Saul, later Paul in Acts 9:1-17, or Peter healing the crippled beggar in Acts 3 and Jesus praying for Peter saying, “Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you ...” (Luke 22:31-32). There are many examples everywhere in the Word of God where prayers are being offered. It is a God desired idea. It will be a great day when the body of Christ includes and recognizes that God can speak through children’s prayer. Children’s prayer has divine power and is inherently able to silence God’s enemies. Teaching children to hear God and pray is not contingent on the organized church. The power in the voice of the child is God-ordained. The church must release children. Ilnisky agrees. “Let’s liberate the children to pray ... release them”<sup>24</sup>

This project took the first steps in prayerfully releasing this group of children to feel freedom in hearing from God and praying for others. The children were instructed, encouraged, laid hands on and their spirit man was activated. The children were taught that they are spiritual beings and God is a Spirit. The children learned about spiritual realms that are real and that they could speak beyond a cute, sweet little prayer. The children were taught by the researcher that prayer was something that God had given to

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<sup>24</sup> Ilnisky, *Let the Children Pray*, 74.

them. The children were taught and encouraged that their prayers were necessary and important to the church and to them. Most of all, the project encouraged the children to keep praying, and keep asking God to speak to them. The project opened the conversation for parents to inquire about spiritual teachings for children. The project recommended literature for parents who were interested in learning more about the power of children praying.

Children, parents and all who assisted with the project were blessed by the sessions and most of all the altar call prayers. This was a first-time experience for the children to pray what they heard from God, rather than prayers they had heard adults pray or rote-learned prayers. This was the first time that many of the adults in the children's ministry had ever heard or seen the children praying for each other. The adults could not resist coming forth for prayer and were moved by the children's honesty and sweet prayers. One adult commented, "The prayers of the children seem to reflect the loving heart of God." Adults and children receiving prayer at the altar walked away showing visible emotions. Children have asked for more opportunities to pray and other children want to take what they are now calling the Prayer Class.

If we could merge this project into the children's ministry it could become a six-session class for children once a quarter, continuing to develop children with an ear for God in the coming generation. The training for children deacons who are selected every year to hear God and pray can also be integrated in the plan and make this a normal expectation. The vision of children praying each week by making the altar call a part of the children's worship service, would also make this a normal expectation. This project encouraged children to talk to God, which is an enrichment from memorized prayers. The

project attempted to make known to children the ever presence of a living God who welcomes them, likes to hear from them and loves to talk to them. This project of children hearing from God and praying for their peers was exciting and implemented as planned.

The project has made a change in the way that ministry is presented in Ray of Hope's children's church. The children and teachers are open to some manifestation of the Spirit of God at the worship time and are now expecting His presence. The children are aware that they are spiritual beings and that the God they serve is a Spirit who relates to them. The children need more but those children participating in the sessions seem to have begun a process of transformation in their prayer lives. The Children's Prayer Group individuals give witness during testimony to praying more now for their friends and in their family. An additional benefit of this project is that it will be possible to observe the younger children in the Children's Prayer Group for the next three years as they remain in children's ministry until age twelve. There is a chance that sessions can be included in the yearly training for children's deacons.

This project, "Cultivating the Spiritual Awareness of Children to Hear from God and Pray for their Peers," did set up an atmosphere for children to learn quiet time to listen for the voice of God. The project provided opportunities to seek, wait and hear the voice of God, and then pray. This concept is no longer strange in this context, but factual. It happened. This group of children are a testimony. It will be important to permanently integrate into the ministry this teaching and manifestation of the Holy Spirit.

For those working with children and wanting to take their children into an encounter with the presence of God, this researcher encourages you to do so. Children are

waiting. They want to understand the other dimension of God. Children hear the church words “Spirit” and “Holy Spirit,” and they hear the stories of the Bible, but without the presence of the power of the Holy Spirit these become empty words. Children’s teachers can change the paradigm for our ‘Tweens’ and pre-teens and help them look for a God who has power that manifests itself today. Ilnisky agrees making this comment about helping children to see their God manifest today:

These times send a succinct, urgent message: children are center front in the secular world controlled by an unholy spirit. To counterattack, I’d love to see families and churches direct more attention and funds-whatever it takes-to provide their children, who are guided by the Holy Spirit, with everything necessary to coach and liberate them to use their God-given spiritual authority in prayer<sup>25</sup>

This project can influence Twenty First Century children’s ministry with evidence that teaching children in greater depth about the Spirit is possible and good. Today the church, and those ministering to children, live in a society of post-modern parents called millennials who are raising post-modern children called Gen-X. The group labeled millennials boast that they do not like institutions, the Bible, or authority. They often ask their children for permission or if whether they wish to participate in an activity instead of guiding and setting for the them things important for development. They are their own arbitrators of right and wrong, discounting their lack of maturity. The connotation of the word “sinner” must never be applied to their person, for to do so is intolerable. This group will need to see a demonstration of the power of God along with sermons, activities and programs. They are exposed to the most powerful imaginary of extreme special effects; and through technology they ask machines for information to their questions and receive worldly insights. They are not seeking a God who cannot be heard.

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<sup>25</sup> Ilnisky, *Let the Children Pray*, 81.

Millennials are a large population of today's humanity. Brian Dembowczyk is the Project Team Leader for the Gospel Project for Kids, one of LifeWay Christian Resources Bible study curricula. Brian was a pastor for sixteen years and served as pastor, discipleship pastor and student pastor at churches in Florida, Maryland, and Kentucky. In his book, *Gospel Centered Kids Ministry* he restates the alarming numbers of young people in the group of millennials who drop out of church. Dembowczyk says,

70 percent of young adults drop out of church. Here's how that breaks down right now: 20% of your kids will walk away from the church for good. 50% of your kids will leave the church for a season, and perhaps return later on and 30% of your kids will stay in church. Let those numbers sink in. In a few years, two out of every ten kids in your church will walk away for good. Five more will leave the church for an extended period of time. They will remove themselves from a church family and dramatically reduce their ability to glorify God. Without the church's accountability and encouragement to guide them, these young adults will increasingly put themselves in the way of temptation.<sup>26</sup>

In my opinion, these young adults go so far as to put themselves in the way of disaster. Dembowczyk goes on to say, "Dropping out of church is far more than rejecting church culture. Walking away from church is forsaking the gospel, refusing to be changed, and rejecting God's mission for us. Walking away from the church is actually walking away from Jesus and all He died for."<sup>27</sup> That spells a life of disaster to me.

How does this dropout rate relate to the children's ministry? Dembowczyk thinks, "Kid's ministry may be the key to reversing the trend of young adults leaving the church."<sup>28</sup> This researcher agrees with Dembowczyk that the procession of children leaving the church once they are in their teens could possibly decrease when we as

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<sup>26</sup> Brian Dembowczyk, *Gospel Centered Kids Ministry* (Nashville, TN: LifeWay Christian Resources, 2017). 14.

<sup>27</sup> Dembowczyk, *Gospel Centered*, 20.

<sup>28</sup> Dembowczyk, *Gospel Centered*, 15.

children's pastors and leaders learn to create a free environment for our children to do more than play, interface with Bible games (which are good) and have fun in worship. The church environment has the opportunity to help children to experience a living God with power who can talk! The church has to search itself, beginning with pastors, teachers and each ministry participant, and evaluate where they stand with the development of spiritual growth in their children's ministries. The average age group of a church dropout seems to be fifteen, with some dropping out younger. That could suggest that it is imperative for the church to put the microscope on, and the investment in the greatest teachers, pastors and theologians to work in Youth and Children's Ministry. That's how important it is to teach children the whole Gospel and nurture their innate gift to hear God. J. D. Victor Fitch, Superintendent in the Seventh-Day Adventist denomination, spoke at the Manitoba-Saskatchewan Conference presenting a speech entitled, "Take Care of Your Lambs" in which he quotes the famous preacher, Charles Spurgeon saying, "Take care of your lambs or where will you get your sheep from?" If a species is going to survive, the young must be protected; otherwise it will become extinct."<sup>29</sup> This quote speaks to me of the great value of the young and their cry for spiritual food- Feed me, Feed me!

All of this speaks to the fact that millennials have children who are raised to do what they like and want to do. It is crucial for the church to present a God who is more than an ancient story. It is important that what children are taught in the church

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<sup>29</sup> J.D. Victor Finch, "Take Care of your Lambs" (Silver Springs, MD: North American Division Office of Education, 2008) 1, accessed March 2017. <http://nadeducation.org/>.

environment is also modeled at home. Children seeing a church life and home life that compromises a holy character lifestyle will be confusing even to the child who is learning to experience God. Children of the Twenty First century are accustomed to smart TV's and smart phones, laptops, everything digital. Adding to that list, children have a short attention span and are expecting all things fun. Their parents are looking for churches that market high-tech to them and their children. The church must give a high-tech demonstration of a living God, by a living church, walking and operating like the living church to reach a great harvest of these children. The sake of the future church is in the hands of the Holy Spirit and He is ready for us to give the children the full gospel.

This Cultivating the Spiritual Awareness of Children to Hear from God and Pray for Their Peer's project confirmed that purposing an environment of teaching about listening and hearing God for the short six sessions over a five-week period, had a positive effect on the children's understanding of God's love and who they are in him. The children developed an understanding that God could use them to speak to others when they allowed Him to help them to see others as God saw them. To think that God was speaking in the music, and in the silent, quiet time was unfamiliar to this generation but in the implementation of this project that concept was taught.

George Barna in his book *Transforming Children Into Spiritual Champions* says,

... you may influence some without intending to or without realizing it, but such influence is real. However, when you focus on purposefully impacting someone's thoughts or behavior, the chances of having such an effect and having the type of effect you hoped to have are increased substantially. Instead of having an accidental or unexpected degree of influence, you experience a more strategic impact on the person's life.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> George Barna. *Transforming Children Into Spiritual Champions* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2003), 59.



This project demonstrated how intentional elements such as teachings on the Holy Spirit and inserting intentional space to teach children to hear from God substantially influenced their desire to pray. They appeared by the end of the sessions to have confidence on prayer not shown in the beginning of the session. They demonstrated confidence in praying for others as well as others gave evidence of wanting prayer from their peers.

Children's ministries can benefit by inserting an intentional time of silence into their ministry order. There is a great opportunity to introduce this lost art of listening back into humanity through our children's ministries. Children's ministries can benefit by being intentional in imprinting on the lives of children. Children's ministries strategically must begin to plan what is the product, the result they want from their children's ministry. Empowerment, investment, and commitment in children's ministry, church leaderships, pastors, parents and staff for this century will start the turn the wheels of change for effective children who minister.

This writer is excited to be a part of this period of time and join others who are interested in expanding the teaching and experience of children regarding the supernatural powers in Bible stories. For example, let's broaden the account of how a young teen boy killed a giant fully armored with one rock! Could the Holy Spirit have been there? Was this supernatural? Was God speaking to David? Or was David just that good? Tell the children this is God's supernatural power. There is a way to make the Bible relevant for today's child.

This researcher believes there are ministries looking for a paradigm shift in children's ministry. A new environment is needed for children to experience God and

spiritual worship. A new environment is needed for children to experience God as they grow in faith-based knowledge. A new paradigm is needed to develop children's prayer teams, children's healing groups and evangelist teams. A new paradigm is needed that sees children as an integrated part of kingdom ministry. This new paradigm shifts to children operating in ministry. They are functioning Christians, capable of handling the Word and not just what we call the milk of the Word. Becky Fischer says, "We must get off the treadmill of feeding our kids a continual diet of basic Bible stories with little to nothing else in the mix and make sure that they are grounded in all of the basic Bible doctrines and concepts that cause us to lead supernatural, victorious lives."<sup>31</sup> We cannot allow the words "supernatural power" and "Holy Spirit" to be triggers of fear in the church when it comes to children. The tension rises again and controversy resurfaces to question how much should children experience of God? Is it safe and is all that necessary for children? The tension is fear-based and without faith or knowledge of a good Father. Our good Father gives good gifts and his plan for each of us is good. In the good Father's plan, the church is a triumphant organism called to worship, to war with forces unseen, and to make His glory known. Mike Seth, Director of Nurturing a Child's Affection for Papa God Ministries says, "Heaven is sending out a sound looking for a response ... when a response is heard, God's says, 'here is the place. I can release,' God says, 'I can establish my dwelling place.'"<sup>32</sup> God finds a place in children trained to listen for his sound. God in his sovereignty put praise in the mouths of babes and infants to bring His

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<sup>31</sup> Fischer, *Redefining*, 232.

<sup>32</sup> Mike Seth. *Methodist School for Supernatural Ministry Session Four: "The Rest."* DVD-ROM. Goodlettsville, TN. Aldersgate Renewal Center, 2014.

plan to fruition. Children's Ministry is challenged to join God and equip children to do kingdom business.

**APPENDIX A**  
**CHILDREN'S CHURCH ORDER OF WORSHIP**

## CHILDREN'S CHURCH ORDER OF WORSHIP

*Arrival 9:30 a.m. for volunteers, prayer and preparing rooms*

Service begins at 10:30 a.m.

Children's deacons assemble, pray and prepare worship area

Worship Time order (classes enter)

Praise and Worship songs

Prayer

Welcome by Children's Deacon

Welcome and Holy Hug (Deacons)

Recite the Vision:     The Vision of the Ray of Hope is to be a city of Hope where  
people will impact and transform this present world into the  
kingdom of God.

Church Core values.

What's happening?

What Time is it? Testimony Time!

Children's Deacon

Song

Choir or Children's Church

Scripture reference for the message

Message

Guest, class presentation or Pastor

Come to Jesus

Soft Music

Dismiss to classes

**Remember to bless your neighbor,** *"the Lord bless you, and keep you; The Lord make  
his face to shine upon you and give you peace." Numbers 6:22*

**HUG YOUR NEIGHBOR**

**APPENDIX B**

**WORSHIP ORDER WITH ALTAR CALL**

## WORSHIP ORDER WITH ALTAR CALL

*Arrival 9:30 a.m. for volunteers, pray and prepare rooms*

Service begins at 10:30 a.m.

Children's deacons assemble, pray and prepare worship area

Worship Time order (classes enter)

Praise and Worship songs

Prayer

Welcome by Children's Deacon

Welcome and Holy Hug (Deacons)

Song

Recite the Vision:     The Vision of the Ray of Hope is to be a city of Hope where  
people will impact and transform this present world into the kingdom of God. Church

Core values.

What's happening?

What Time is it? Testimony Time!

Children's Deacon

Song

Choir or Children's Church

Altar Call

Message

Guest, class presentation or Pastor

Come to Jesus

Soft Music

Dismiss to classes

**Remember to bless your neighbor,** *"the Lord bless you, and keep you; The Lord make  
his face to shine upon you and give you peace." Numbers 6:22*

HUG YOUR NEIGHBOR

**APPENDIX C**

**DAILY SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE SCALE**



DAILY SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE SCALE (color coded for children)  
Used by author's permission

	<b>Daily Spiritual Experience Scale</b>	<b>Many times, in a day</b>	<b>Every day</b>	<b>Some times</b>	<b>Once in a while</b>	<b>Never or almost never</b>
	<b>Student Participant # _____</b>	<b>Place an X in the box - only one per</b>				
<b>1</b>	I feel God's presence.					
<b>2</b>	I experience God's presence when I pray					
<b>3</b>	During worship, or at other times when connecting with God, I feel joy					
<b>4</b>	I think I feel things from the spirit realm					
<b>5</b>	I feel good about hearing God					
<b>6</b>	I feel uncomfortable praying for others					
<b>7</b>	I feel comfortable praying for others					
<b>8</b>	I feel I know how to ask God for directions					
<b>9</b>	I feel I can pray what I hear from the Spirit.					
<b>10</b>	I feel God's love for me.					
<b>11</b>	I feel God's love for me, through others.					
<b>12</b>	I would feel afraid to hear the voice of God					
<b>13</b>	I feel thankful to know the Holy Spirit					
<b>14</b>	I feel I care and love others.					
<b>15</b>	I accept others even when they do things I think are wrong.					
<b>16</b>	I desire to be closer to God or go deeper when I pray					
	<b>Scale for Question #17 only</b>	<b>Not close</b>	<b>Some-what close</b>	<b>Very close</b>	<b>Close as possible</b>	
<b>17</b>	In general, how close do you feel to God?					

**APPENDIX D**

**KINGDOM KID CITIZENSHIP CARD**

## KINGDOM KID CITIZENSHIP CARD



Figure 3 Kingdom Kid Citizenship Card

**APPENDIX E**  
**VOICES OF THE CHILDREN**

### Voices of the Children

The children were given questions to reflect about from the lessons. From Lesson One we discussed God as a Spirit and how He breathed His Spirit into us and we became living souls.

How do you see God, who is He to you?

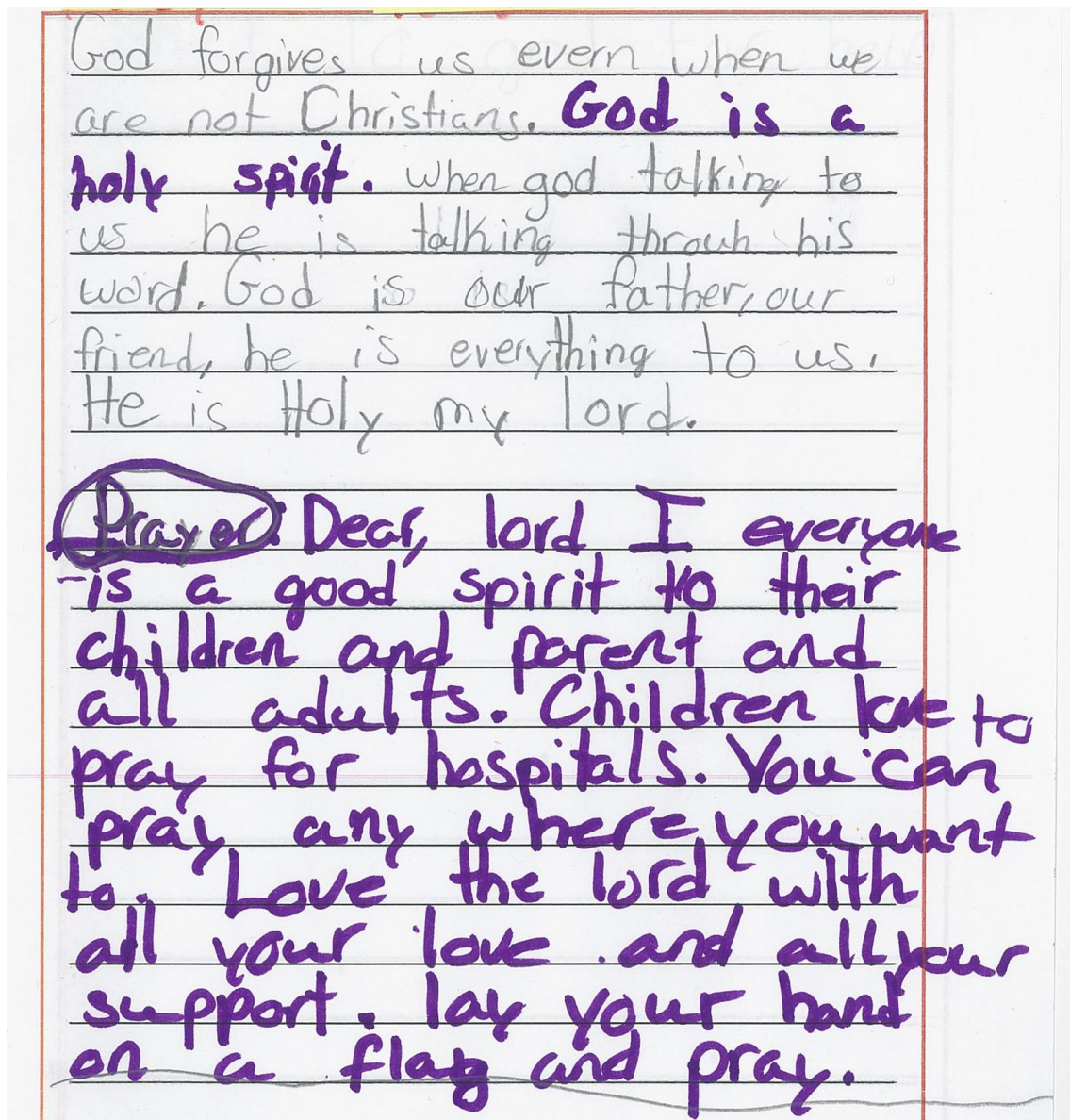


Figure 4 Voices of the Children 1a

Question: How do you talk to God?

Shout To god for help

Figure 5 Voices of the Children 1b

This 10-year-old child from the group reported asking God for help during the day, she felt anxious and asked God to help. She reports she heard His voice.

9/21/17

Today, I have a big test I have to pass it  
 or I will not be happy with myself. But,  
 Then I felt a little dezen but I know it was  
 the angles Surddering me. I heard a voice

Figure 6 Voices of the Children 1c



The same child draws a picture showing her perception of how God speaks to her. She knows she heard God's voice because He lives in her heart. This student makes notes from the session, there are three voices; God's Voice, Her Voice and the Voice of the Enemy.

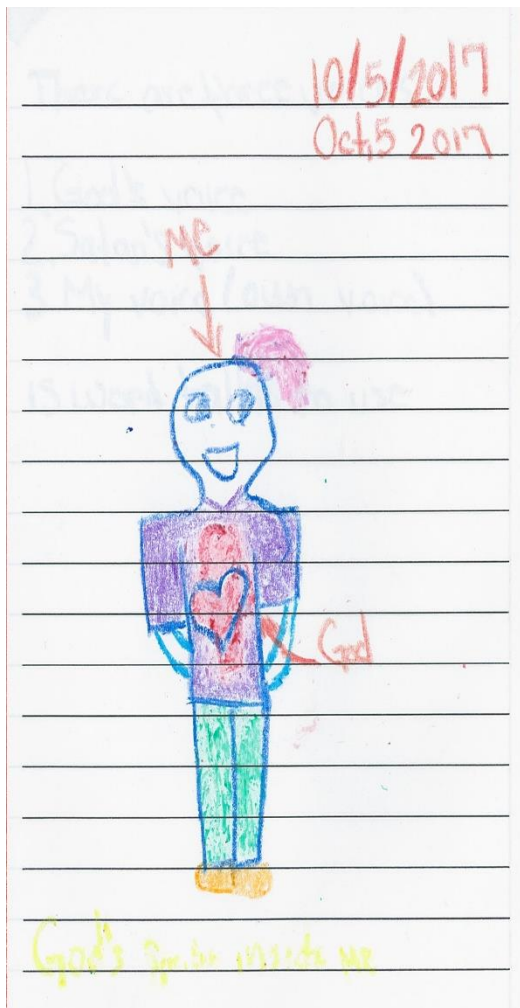


Figure 7. Where *Ruach* Lives 1a

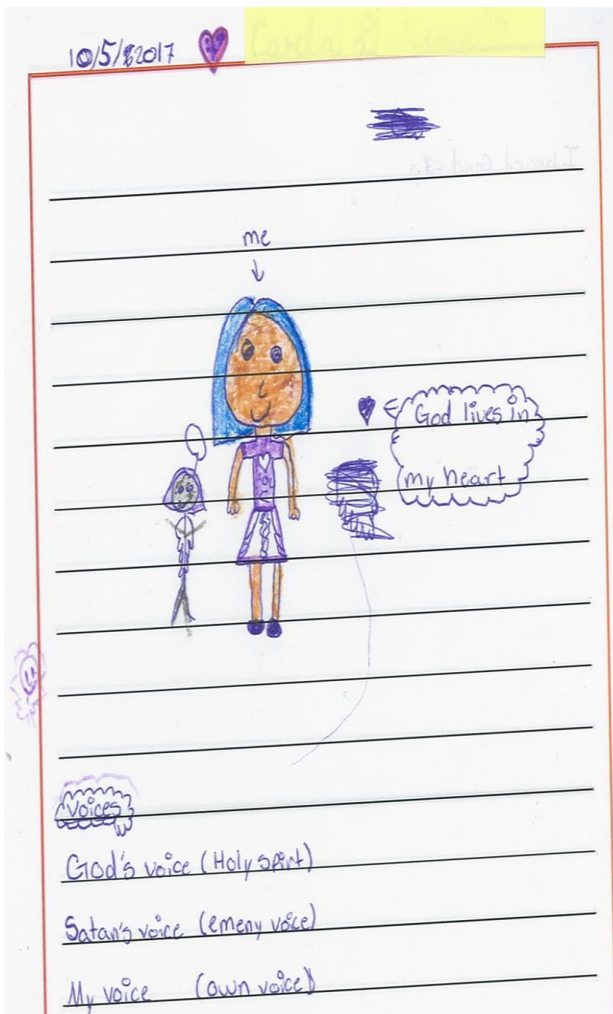


Figure 8. Where *Ruach* Lives 1b

The group loved the word, *Ruach*. Each week they referred to the *Ruach* of God. See answers to the question is God's *Ruach* with you every day? The students were becoming aware that you can talk to God anywhere and at any time. God can speak to you any place and time.



Figure 9 Where God Lives



Question: Reflect on what you think about Spirit Realm and Natural Realm?

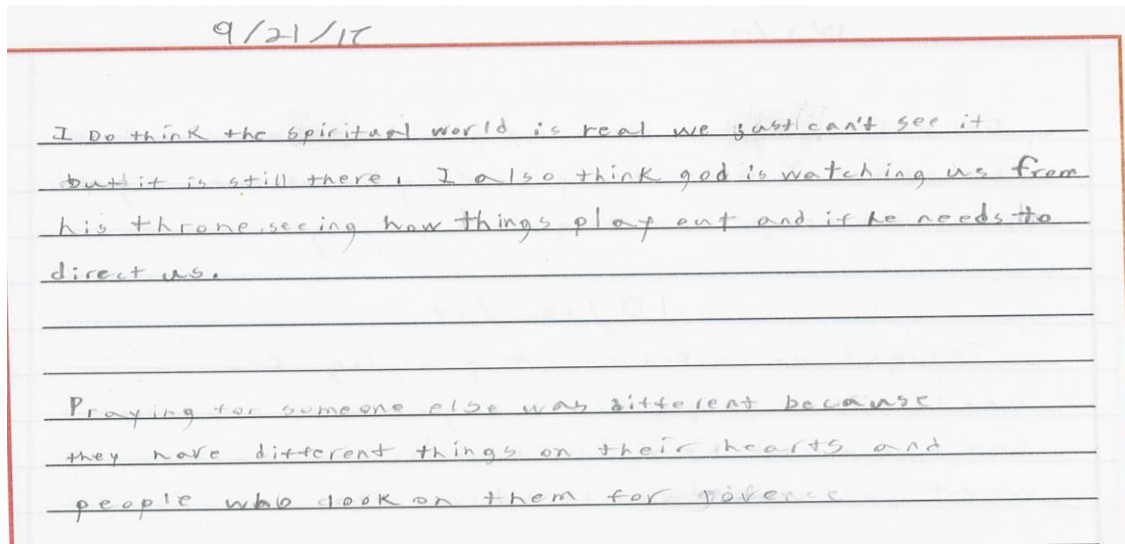


Figure 10 Reflections on Spirit Realm as Light and Darkness 1a

### Spirit Realm as Light and Darkness

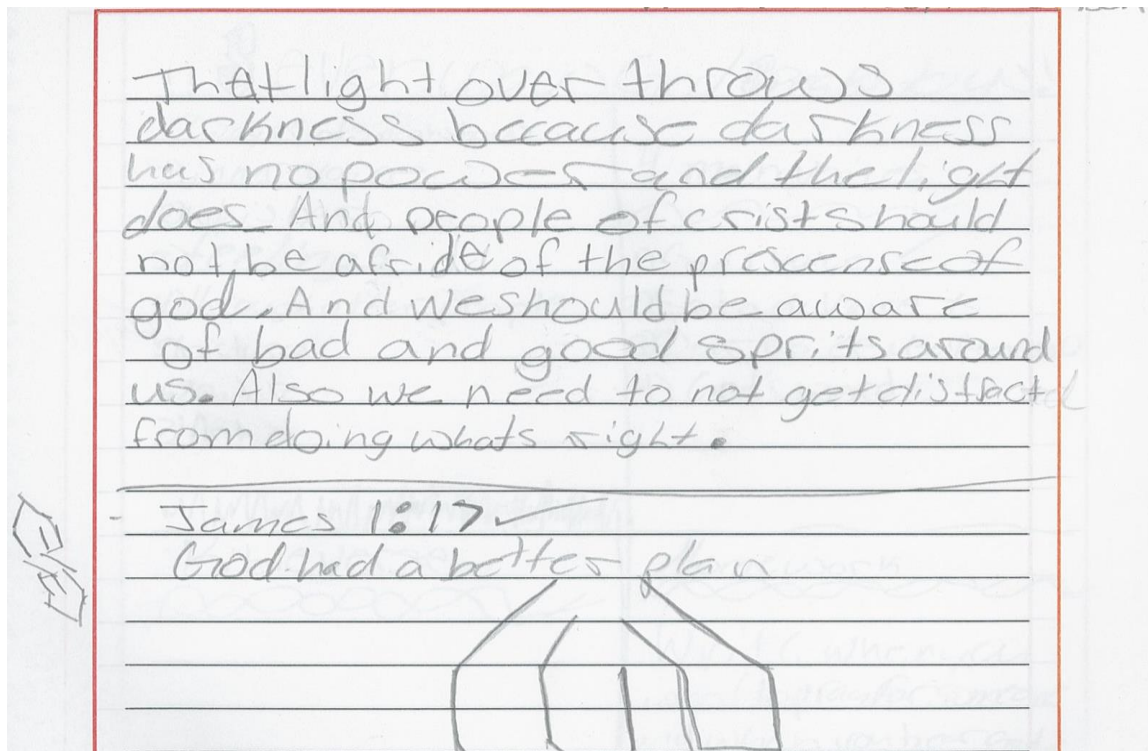


Figure 11 Reflections on Spirit Realm as Light and Darkness 1b

This child reported this incident to describe when He heard from the Spirit of God. He felt led to pray for his grandmother, who was driving. (He did not give a destination) His Grandmother had not called anyone to say she was lost. He reported just having “a feeling something was wrong.”

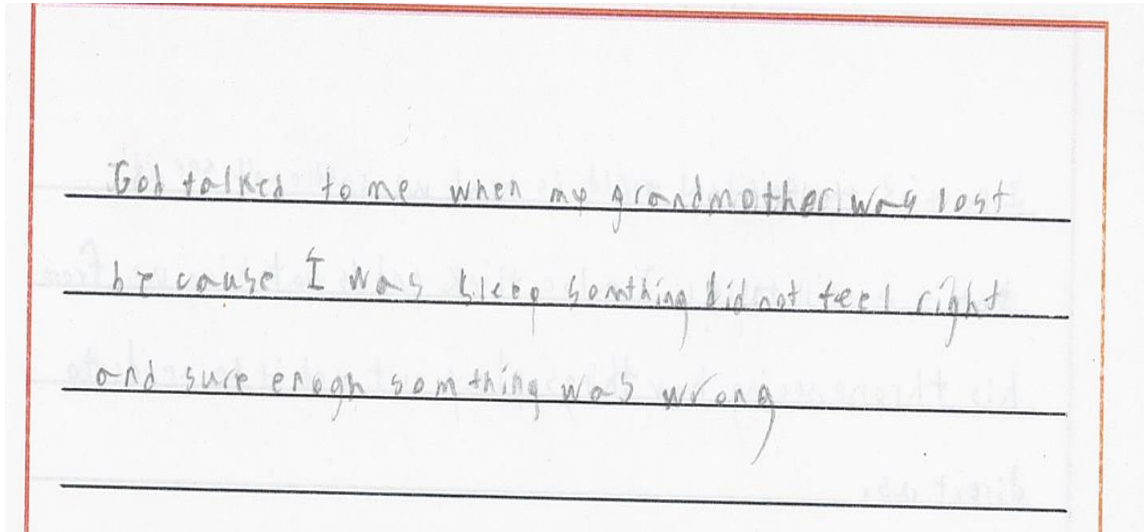


Figure 12 Reflections on Spirit Realm as Light and Darkness 1c

Later Grandmother shared she had gotten lost while driving to a pick-up her friend. She had gotten confused. The child felt God spoke to him and prayer worked.

Children during the week felt the desire to pray for others and followed the lead of the Holy Spirit. Two children shared prayers for a friend.

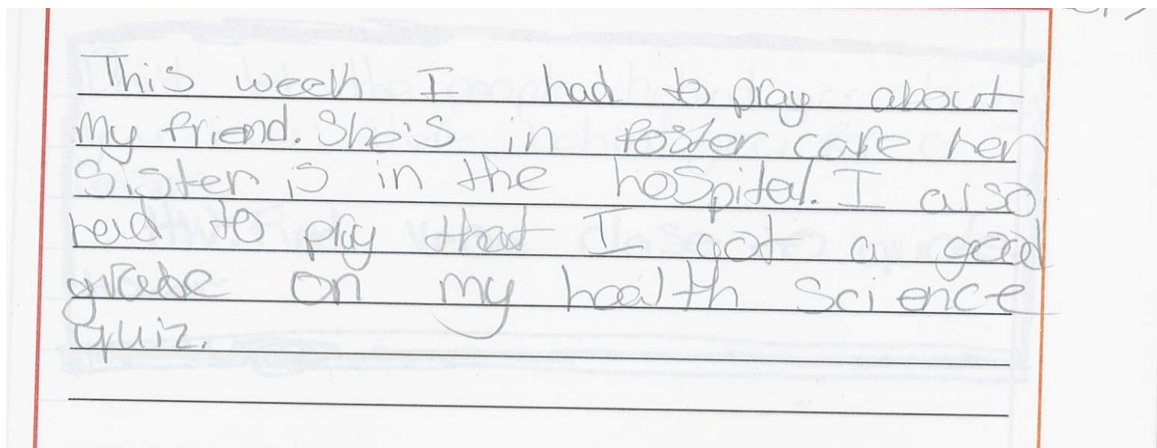
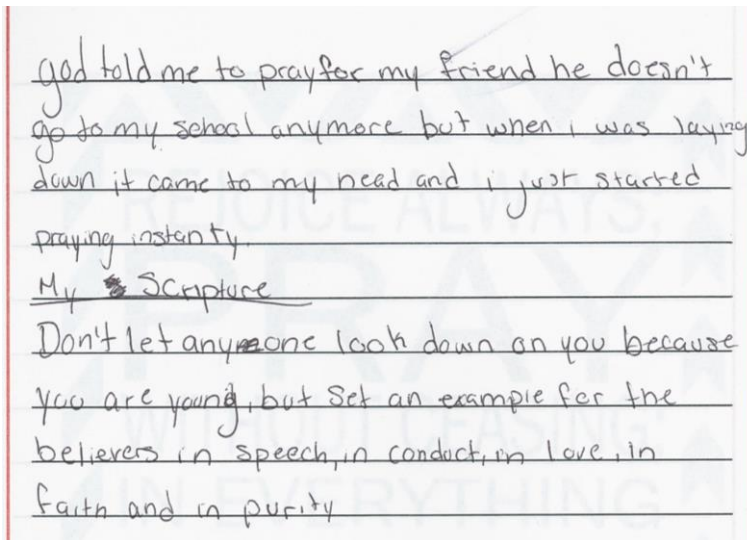


Figure 13 Reflections on Spirit Realm as Light and Darkness 1d



god told me to pray for my friend he doesn't  
go to my school anymore but when i was laying  
down it came to my head and i just started  
praying instantly.

My Scripture

Don't let anyone look down on you because  
you are young, but set an example for the  
believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in  
faith and in purity

Figure 14 Reflections on Spirit Realm as Light and Darkness 1e

More thoughts on the Spirit Realm and the power of Light and Darkness.

Child's Testimony about Hearing the Voice of God. Comment from her pre-survey.



Figure 15 Hearing the Voice of God

**APPENDIX F**  
**HOW DOES GOD SPEAK?**

## How does God Speak?

God is so much fun that He like to speak to us in lots of different ways. Here are some of the ways God speaks:

<b>Audible Voice</b>	This is when God speaks out loud just as though he were sitting right next to you in the room.
<b>Inner Audible Voice</b>	This is when God speaks really clear and loud inside of you (no one else but you can hear it).
<b>Whisper</b>	This is when God speaks into your heart or mind in a still small voice like a whisper.
<b>Spontaneous Thought</b>	This is when you “feel something. For example, you just ‘feel’ like you’re supposed to give someone a hug or you just “feel” like God doesn’t want you to do something.
<b>Knowing</b>	This is when you have no idea why, but you just “know” something. It’s like your knower just knows!
<b>Scripture</b>	This is when God brings his scripture alive in your heart and you can hear him while you are reading our Bible.
<b>Other People</b>	This is when God speaks to us through other people, like your parents, your pastor, or a friend. When they say something to you, and you know that God is the one really saying it to you. And He is just using them to say it.
<b>Signs</b>	This is when God speaks to you through signs, mysteries, colors, numbers, etc.
<b>Pictures</b>	This is when God speaks to you through a vision, a dream, and imagination, or a picture in your mind.
<b>Nature</b>	This is when God speaks to us through nature. As you’re admiring nature, God can reveal Himself and speak to you.
<b>Art</b>	This is when Go speaks to us though art, dance, songs, poetry, etc.

The reality is that God can speak in so many ways; He’s even spoken through a donkey before! Each one of us hears in a unique way too! God wants us to learn to hear Him in all the ways that He speaks and to always be listening for Him.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jennifer Toledo, Eyes that See and Ears that Ear, A Parent’s Guide to Teaching Their Children How to Hear the Voice of God, (Dinuba, CA: Global Children’s Movement, 2007.)

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